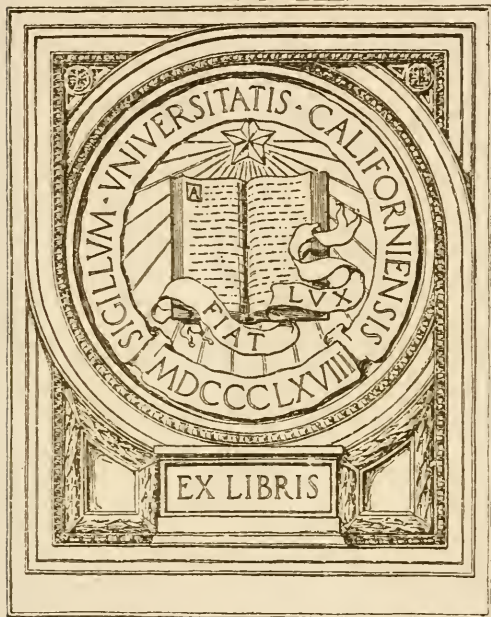


THE CAVERNS OF DAWN

BY JAMES PAXTON VORHEES

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THE CAVERNS OF DAWN



THE CAVERNS OF DAWN

BY
JAMES PAXTON VOORHEES

Author of "Wissy," "The Tale of Wealth,"
Other Stories, and Poems

O dear, fondest heart! Of the days that are past,
And cling in their tenderness close round the soul,
May we dream on as now, until, at the last,
When joys, out of dreams, in their splendors unroll,
We see, in our loved ones, the hope that we cast,
With deep, longing sight, at their flight to love's goal.



PLAINFIELD, INDIANA
THE RAIDABAUGH-VOORHEES COMPANY

1910

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THE CALLER PRESS
PLAINFIELD, INDIANA

To his son

CHARLES FRANCIS VOORHEES

*A tried, true and faithful soul
this story is affectionately inscribed
by his father
the author*

259585

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With a deep and charitable consciousness of our common failings, and in the blessed and natural certainty and conviction of our final release and salvation, my duty is undertaken.

Not a great while since, an eminent public speaker (Mr. Taft), talking to a large assembly at Cooper Union, New York, was interrupted by a question from someone in the audience.

"How," shouted a voice—its owner evidently stirred by deep and vital interest,—“how about the unemployed?”

Mr. Taft cried:

“God knows!”

A newly risen Moses, in the Northwest—his name is Johnson—Mr. Johnson, not long ago, was asked by a well known writer—Mr. Steffens—what was the trouble with our social system. Mr. Johnson is quoted as replying:

“No one, in the whole world, knows.”

Taken in connection with previous experience in the case of William Jennings Bryan, another quotation from the magazine writer has, in an even increased sense, led us to suppose that Mr. Bryan in effect holds:

“If one thing won’t do, try another,”—which is all very well as far as it goes; but it don’t go far enough.

In my own opinion—and, I dare say, it is as good as anyone’s—in my own opinion, it is useless and unnecessary to longer continue skipping around in this cloud-land and fog, playing at political and social hide and seek, when there is a way out.

Does “no one, in the whole world, know,” what the trouble is with our system of living? is the question. *I* say, there is someone—and there are many who know,

and many more who, if they do not, may easily, readily learn.

The facts are plain and simple, and may be read and comprehended not only by those running, but by those standing still or sitting down, as well.

The trouble is, simply, insincerity and want of personal good faith; together with the continued and unbearable existence of personal and selfish indifference—a clear personal problem, with the solution plainly in view, and each and every single one of us concerned in and accountable for the solving of that problem.

It has been with a sense of the gravest—of the deepest and most solemn personal—responsibility, that I have brought myself—been brought to write—to prepare this narrative.

It may not seem a pleasant view that we are obliged to take; nevertheless, it is an unavoidable one, and, in spite of the best, the kindest, the most humane and charitable disposition, will have to be given in plain, unvarnished terms—terms, however, intended to convey facts and conditions and release; not a measure of censure or of punishment and of further suffering and distress. We will surely exercise forbearance and mercy in dealing justly with our mutual faults and shortcomings.

Selfishness, destructive pride, faithlessness and brutality largely go to make up our social life.

It will not be possible to fully and satisfactorily express the meaning—the inevitable meaning of the story of *THE CAVERNS OF DAWN*, without an additional word to fix our thought upon the Individual, in society or out of it; and upon the realization of the responsibility of that Individual to its own as well as to another's welfare.

Once understand that *We* ourselves are the makers of our own troubles and our joys; that, in the beginning,

as a race or evidence of life, we exist by our own separate, independent powers, alone; and not by politics, government or social conditions of any kind other than those contained in common safety and decency—in the fair attributes of personal character—once learn all this (and we will, of course, before we get through), and the problems of the day, and of the hour, and of the minute are easily solved—personality, as personality alone can, supplying the solution.

Confucius,—a wise old Chinaman!—ages ago said something, in substance, very similar:

“Four fifths of life consist in personal conduct; the remaining fifth may be given to the other affairs of existence.”

To-day, I say, it's all personal—*five* fifths personal; faith, no matter what kind, or whether good or bad; benevolence; charity; pride; humility; love; virtue; evil, itself; business—all the common elements of life unflinching refer back to personalism.

Is it, therefore, not true that these things of a further personal obligation and nature should be realized—must be—is it not true?

If realized, can there be any doubt of our having found a remedy, relief for our otherwise seemingly insupportable and grievous personal ills and burdens? Assuredly, there can be none; and I leave the ensuing story, with its best aim and purpose, to show how unselfishness and fair play may bring a cure.

The human race, with its natural failings, has yet experienced a great and imposing past; and one in which, doubtless, it has acted for the best, according to its lights. However, in the even happier intelligence of the present, drawn from the perception of a truer relation to ourselves, to each other, to society and to humanity, may we not expect to joyously withdraw, as they

willingly flee before us, from the unhappier shadows of gloom and despair, and into the brighter and gladder sunlight of perfect hope, love and universal happiness here and hereafter!

With the foregoing view, my work is done.

J. P. V.

Greencastle, Indiana,

July 20, 1908.

The Caverns of Dawn.

CHAPTER I.

NIGHT AND MORNING.

It was night.

He stood alone upon the bridge. Beyond, the lights of the city spread out in fantastic fire. The heavens glowed with the stars eternal, unchanging. Solitude, fit companion for memory, surrounded him. The phantoms of the past—of failure and of retribution—moved, in dancing, shadowy images, before his vision. He saw cities where thousands toiled; vast halls and throngs assembled. He saw himself a helpless speck, an atom, in this whirling mass of energy and selfish triumph—himself in hopeless struggle for a right. In the crowds he saw those ever seeming to befriend him—ever to oppose his wrongs; but ever silently and unseen faithlessly and treacherously plotting in his overthrow. In the name of eternal justice and truth! what did it all mean? He was crushed—beaten. Was he going mad? He had not even the poor comfort of failing reason where he might blindly grope his darkened way into a merciful oblivion. Old forms and institutions were tottering, falling, crumbling into pitiful but kindly decay and vanishing in a sheltering past. Why could he not find release and hide, forever hide, the wreck of his own tragic sail in a haven of forgotten things—of forgetfulness? Gleams of fitful and disordered intelligence lit the gloom; spent their little life like broken sword blades stained blood red or bits of jangled lightning coming to abrupt and sudden stops, and left unsatisfied results

as ashes tasteless in the mouth. Where should he turn from that haunting procession of ghostly shapes! The river, reflecting the glimmering stars, flowed silently at his feet. He gazed long into its depths, but the phantoms were there. He faced Arlington and the broad open country across the river, where a nation's dead lay buried—shadowy shapes, here, were crowding thick—thick and fast. He turned slowly to the city—and the phantoms still pursued him. Was there no rest? There was none.

Morning.

The city gleamed and sparkled in the rising sun like a great jewel flashing over a new world divine radiance—the heart of a vast nation where have been humanity's hopes and longings for a hundred years and more. Signalizing promise, it told of the lofty purposes of a mighty republic. It was not concerned with phantom shapes. Why should it be? Wrong could not dwell here. Failure and retribution! Impossible—idle. Are not such visions, then, the mere product of a dreamer's mind? Away with these phantoms! They are false. Waste not your time upon them. Away, away with evil phantoms!

The scene was a familiar one, in a park, beneath the trees. There, lingered the man who had stood beside the river. He lounged silently, restlessly and uneasily beside the colossal equestrian statue of a dead president. A living one presided across the way. The blackbirds were looking for their breakfast; so was the man—who, the night before, had watched the waters as they flowed beneath the bridge—the old, old bridge of sighs!

As he loitered near the statue, a middle-aged woman and an attractive, fair young girl still in her teens approached. The man, evidently acquainted with the new arrivals, nodded and the girl and woman paused.

"Have you got a place yet?" he asked.

"No, Mr. Jump," returned the elder of the two females. "Mr. Blazes——"

"You think he'll get a position for you?" drearily queried the first speaker, interrupting the other.

"Mr. Blazes? He says he'll do *something* for us," the woman answered, but there was a certain evasiveness in her manner and speech that caught the other's attention.

Her companion expressively stretched forth his arm in the direction of the effigy of the dead president.

"So," he said, wearily, "will that statue."

"I do not know what we will do, if he does not," she made reply.

"Nor I," said the man.

The breezes blew over the people's beautiful pleasure ground, the trees waved their branches gaily, the water from the handsome drinking fountain trickled and murmured and sounded refreshingly upon the ear, and, sighing, the woman, with the young girl, passed on; like the blackbirds and the lonely and helpless figure by that monument to human greatness and worth they, too, were looking for their breakfast.

The man did not have to wait long for his.

"Just a moment, please," said he, and detained a friend who was hurrying by to his duties in one of the government departments. The hungry man was eager, and his passing friend was kind.

A word or two; the hand of the delayed department official went to his pocket; a coin was handed the other, and the two separated.

Jason Jump, the recipient of the loan, was once editor of a flourishing country newspaper. He was now a national claimant. His claim, alas! however, appeared to be upon charitable humanity, and powerless to obtain

justice from the laws of his native land. He was long a noted figure in Washington; suffered much; was eventually known as one of the most daring and famous outlaws of his times, and, in his crimes and in their origin, realized the sad and mournful dreams—the inexorable results of the ages of government and misrule.

“Come with me,” said a friendly voice at the claimant’s elbow, directed in apparent sympathetic persuasiveness to the brooding sufferer from national and universal ills.

The one addressed turned at this unexpected and amicable request, and recognized in the man making it a familiar though hardly to be trusted acquaintance.

The speaker took the object of his address by the arm, and without waiting for a reply walked with a brisk step to a nearby rich and elegant drinking resort. The two entered. It was early and they were among the first there.

Were you ever in a drinking place during the early morning hours when the atmosphere is amber like the color of pale beer, and the air has a faint, exhilarating odor of past stimulants and a vague and undefined allurement in promise of future ones,—were you? If not, you can scarcely know the thrill of dangerous hope that seized upon the defeated and disappointed worldly soul of Jason Jump brought hither by the cunning of his sleepless tempter, Bradford Simons.

O wine—O drink; O solace of broken, blighted sorrow-stricken lives; O condemned medium of forgetfulness, what may be said of you in fatal praise and in lingering, fairest warning!

As they entered the place, they brushed past a young fellow who, with face flushed after a night of gaiety in the city—and still attired in evening dress, opera top coat and hat,—was preparing after a final bracer to make

his way a little unsteadily home. The claimant and his companion stepped aside, while the early reveler went out with a tuneful and sprightly impromptu:

"Oh, for women and wine and song,
And the night that is given to joy,—
Oh, for the heart that is ever young,
And the pleasures that minstrels have ever sung,
And the bells that bridals have ever rung,—
Oh, love for a gay old boy!"

The place was a famous and notable one. Its luxury, the fashionable elegance of its well known, extensive patronage, and its atmosphere of ease and wealth appealed in overpowering waves to the unhappy government castoff. Costly paintings decorated the walls, cut glass glittered and shimmered with the many colored iridescence of varied memory-stilling contents. A white-aproned, white-jacketed waiter approached. The service, like the rest of it, was immaculate.

"You've had trouble, Jason," said the claimant's companion, using his friend's christian name, and with a kind of formal gravity, as the two seated themselves comfortably at a table. The speaker was large, tall and florid; the other, short, heavy set and dark.

"Yes," gloomily and despairingly replied the claimant, and the shadows of past mistakes and wrong came stealing in, again—once more, the phantoms!

"I wouldn't stand it," continued his friend, with, as before, an air of apparent grave and quiet concern for the other. The speaker, both having drunk, pushed his glass to one side on the table and gazed at the troubled subject of national ways with a peculiar and baffling scrutiny.

"You wouldn't—wouldn't you?" queried the other, his tones sounding a note of mournful and ironical pathos in that resort for wealth, idle pleasure and those in power.

"Take my advice, Jump, and get even,"—the companion of the claimant here leaned back in his chair and, with an air of assumed carelessness, coolly lighted a cigar. He bided his time; he could wait—and he did.

"That's all very well—but how?" asked Jump, in his turn, leaning with his arms on the table and stretching forward in an attitude of earnest questioning and a too unmistakable interest. A little more urging—!

"See here," said his friend, while his voice was lowered darkly, "if law is no better than such as *they* make, I'd make my own law!"

"You mean——?" exclaimed the defeated man, comprehension, for the first time, appearing to dawn in his anxious and disturbed eyes.

"I mean what I have always said," returned the other, deliberately. "There is plenty of money to be made out there, and it's only right to take the law in your own hands. Leave your state and government—they've done nothing for you. Go back with me."

The baited man made an effort to control himself, only partially succeeding.

"Damnation, Brad, let me alone, will you!" he cried desperately. "I have told you, never to speak to me of that again," but Jump's manner, rendered pliant by drink, was not devoid of encouragement to the other, and the latter apologetically and adroitly replied:

"No offense. The cattle trade is a good trade."

"Cattle trade?" questioned the victim.

"Why, yes," returned the tempter, with now an effective pretense of indifference; "didn't I tell you that it was only a kind of cattle business?"

Jason sat and gazed at the figure before him. He knew the man was purposely misleading him, but a certain unfailing sense of moral sufficiency that had, in all

the difficulties of his life, sustained him seemed to be slipping away.

"Cattle lifting—outlawry!" commented the fated and reckless object of social and governmental ills. The old, old story!

"Why, now," was the reply, in an aggrieved tone, "a little business in cattle and—er—things that are lost!" and Brad Simons, looking like an angel rebuked in the delivery of a message of salvation, by a gesture indicated in space how somewhere and somehow cattle and "things" could disappear and be humanely rescued.

Jump pondered. Convinced of the unreliability and worse of the unscrupulous cattle dealer, he yet felt, in his slowly weakening resolution, a sudden fierce attraction to the wild law of barbaric self redress. The voice of liberty in all ages and all climes vibrating through the seducer's temptation has sung this never changing song! The Scottish clansman, returning to his thatch where wife and bairn, by act of faithless government, lay murdered, once sought the rocks and fastnesses of his native wilds and, Rob Roy like, fattened his revenge on the chattels and the blood of his tyrants and oppressors; the misused of the middle ages, peasant and gentle, Jack Cade and Robin Hood, had found relief from their intolerable burdens and abuses in open outlawry and rebellion. Then why should not he, thought this melancholy instance of modern faithlessness and wrong, turn upon his own times and kind?

The betrayed and ruined man hesitated, and in his hesitation was the first seed of crime of which all government must take note—the first germ of revolt in the retaliation of the weak when abused by the strong.

"I know—against your principles—it is so much easier to go on serving those who have ruined you!" The

sneering irony and sarcasm of this speech were not lost upon Jason Jump.

"Listen," began the claimant steadily: "This treatment by the government, as you know, broke her heart and killed my wife and set my poor children adrift,"—the hearer respectfully inclined his head,—"and it will surely kill me in time, but——"

"Bah!" interrupted the listener, "is it right to continue like a poor, helpless fool to submit, where in power they are capable of nothing but unbearable abuse and mistreatment—brutal betrayal of their country; destruction of its citizens?"

"I do not know," replied Jason Jump, with a solemn and pathetic sadness.

"Has it ever been or will it ever be that the wronged, so wronged, will not have to rise up in their might and redress their own wrongs?"

"True," replied Jump.

"You had better," said the cunning revolutionary, "make one of us."

The claimant's surcharged soul had been tried to the last point of endurance.

"If I cannot obtain right in this world, one way, I will another," burst in a tortured cry from the hapless creature in final and open rebellion against his wrongs. The speaker's smooth and colorless face had taken on a flush not wholly attributable to the liquor he had drunk; and as he continued to sit and watch the one opposite him he seemed to undergo some subtle change. An evil film appeared to spread itself over his eyes, and a hardening settled in the finer lines about his mouth. The whole expression of the man had altered—from a countenance of openness and candor his had become one of cunning, treachery and deceit. Thickly and with apparent difficulty he spoke again. "I will see him; I

will have justice, or—I will——!” he broke off with a wild and menacing snarl.

The other nodded his head understandingly.

The victim of the injustice of government sat silent.

And the phantoms of heartlessness, wrong and oppression and of the night before upon the bridge circled him about, mocked and pressed, ever pressed him on.

And this was Washington!

Jason Jump elbowed his way through the crowded corridors of the capitol, on his way to a committee room where a committee, of which his congressman was a member, was accustomed to hold its sessions. As Jump was passing rapidly on, the woman and girl whom he had met on the day previous in the park stepped out from the recess of a window, where they had detached themselves from the crowd, and the woman, with a pleased smile, greeted the hurrying man.

Mary Walker and her daughter! Don't you remember them? “No,” you say; “but I remember someone—something about a woman and her child fighting—somewhere struggling—for existence. Same things, isn't it?” Yes, same thing—same old thing!

Jason paused.

“Are you still trying to get them to do something for you?” he said commiseratingly, in response to her greeting.

“Yes,” replied the woman; while the girl, nearing twenty years of age and pretty, turned away her face framed in bronze gold hair, and now mantled with a sudden flush under Jason Jump's grave scrutiny, and aimlessly let her glance wander off through the window, where her dreamy, puzzled gaze rested upon the sloping lawn of the capitol, with here and there a squirrel skipping gaily and happily about in the sweet spring air.

"What will he do?" asked the man, staring stonily into the eyes of the mother. "Anything new?"

"He says, although he promised to do so, that he cannot get *me* a place; but seems unusually interested in Mona," said Jump's informant, with a gesture in the direction of the younger female. The face of the older woman wore an expression of uncertainty and uneasiness as she scanned Jason's countenance.

"Your daughter," was the simple comment.

"My daughter," and the uneasiness of the other increased.

"Do you want him to be so interested?" further said Jason.

"I do not," the mother was positive in voice and manner.

"And you must let him be?" said Jump with curious insistence.

"We must, or starve," cried the woman hopelessly.

"I will see," said the man, "what can be done." A hard, determined look—one, however, inspired by friendship and sympathy for the mother and her child—accompanied his earnest speech.

"Oh! do," exclaimed the other.

He left them, and forged on through the crowd. Some as yet inextinguishable spark of the native kindredship of humankind, as well as of chivalry and reverence for women, burned like coals of fire deep down in his soul. He forged on.

"I'll save them from that fellow Swarth Blazes," he muttered, and who knows but the spirit of fair play brooding over the place gave him credit; while the phantoms and the shadows ever flew before him.

And still this was the capital of our nation!

CHAPTER II.

A GLIMPSE OF LAW AND GOVERNMENT; TOGETHER WITH
SOME THINGS UNPLEASANTLY DUE TO
THE ABSENCE OF BOTH.

The applicant for justice at the doors of the last resort! What say the gloating phantom shapes of past faithlessness and sorrows?

“They who come here ask for bread and receive a stone!”

O Shadow, does this carry with it good faith?

The hollow voice comes taunting, mocking back:

“It carries with it desperation and fatal recklessness; and, verily! it is the occasion of monstrous and diabolical evil, beginning the great movement of retaliation and reprisal which animates the injured in all nature!”

And, O you in power! In this final stage, the subject of abuse, facing total destitution and desertion, has but one of two alternatives: The Law of Reprisal, call it criminal or otherwise; or The Law of Death, self inflicted—the latter surely a choice hardly to be expected as offering a rational solution of our troubles, in the eminent judgment of the infallible congress, itself. If, then, oh, wise ones—oh, humane ones—we can do no better, and as we can, perhaps, hardly expect our abused citizens to considerately destroy themselves, let us be mercifully thankful we are criminals and are carefully preparing the way of becoming an organized and perpetual race of criminals and callous and hardened breakers of the law.

The phantoms have spoken.

They swirled, did the people, about the doors of congress, a sluggish, eddying current drawing surely to a vortex where many go down—where few survive. They flowed up to the north door of the house, which looked through the long vista of statuary hall, rotunda and corridor to the south door of the senate. They ebbed into the adjacent window nooks and sections of hallway. They fretted, worried and fumed. They were sullen and threatening whirlpools of humanity. Was there not cause? Do all of us get justice?—The soldier, who has journeyed long to this Mecca, the luxury of which, for the individual public servant, he has given his own blood to purchase and provide; the little Miss Flite, with her birds; the other poor creature, bedizened in flashy garb and rouge; the lame and halt of heart, mind and body—they all filled the circling eddies with drifting castaways to be reclaimed—never? The richly clad, pompous, rotund example, in silk hat, links of gold watch chain extending across his capacious, oily front; swinging in his imposing gait a massive gold-headed cane—he was there, also. Hence, in this last instance, the owner of the lobby, in its turn the owner of the soul of congress and its acts, was there. The frescoes upon the walls of this palace of justice and law showed, in beautiful, entrancing colors and gilding, the figures of youth, of purity, of liberty and of good faith. Hence, once more, it was but fitting that a mother followed by a sweet and lovely girl yet in her teens should be there, trying pitifully to efface her own less engaging and more matured personality in the face of her congressman (representative or senator), that the charms of the blossom brought from the little garden at home—the child—the daughter—might bring to play upon the immaculate congressional sense and taste an influence to operate in

relieving and supplying their dire distress and want. Of this the Goddess of Liberty, Truth and Righteousness, construable in the before mentioned frescoes, doubtless took note of record and official justification. They were all there; even the priest—the minister—the man of God—walked with sleek self consciousness assured of a common or an uncommon chance to rise or fall. They all greeted each other, here, with a strange smile of unfamiliar recognition. They knew not each other save by the common likeness they bore Him they called their Maker. They were a multitude of strangers that hard, cruel necessity had drawn together. But in the charming indifference of this enchanting spot, it was good that, “One touch of nature made the whole world kin!” They seethed and boiled and bubbled and crowded about the doors of the national halls of legislation, hungry, anxious, careworn, distracted, little knowing, little caring, at last, whether what they were striving for represented right, justice, fairness or not—even losing sight, in the end, of the native and righteous cause which first brought them there—stunted in every moral sense, ready, as in the case of Jason Jump, in desperation to resort to any means which might accomplish their object—subsistence—life, itself.

And this is our system!

The shadows are flying, flying. Another utterance. Hear what it is: Society has assumed itself to be the stronger—has implied the individual to be the weaker. Society, governed by a few mostly self placed governors, has made its own conditions. The individual has surrendered to them. Those conditions are imperfect. Society is responsible for its whole and its parts. Society is guilty, if the subject individual is guilty. Society should be punished, if the individual should be punished. The leaders and the organizers of association must

surely and inevitably share in the consequences of their own faulty and selfish construction, and, consciously or otherwise, are unhappily inviting nameless calamities that were best, indeed, left unspoken in the lives of themselves and their descendants,—results, nevertheless, surely courting grievous revolution and sorrow, without the individual majority awaking to respect and sympathy for individual hardship, suffering and want.

Let us draw on to that wonderful beehive, the national assembly. There are good bees and evil bees in the marvelous legislative body—conscience shall answer which are the good and which the bad.

Mr. Wilson, of Chicago, was consulting his representative in congress, the Honorable Swarth Blazes, of the Blank District of the State of Blank. The visiting gentleman was fat and shiny and smiled, with wide and beaming expansiveness, as he consulted—in the usual way!

“How’s the old gentleman?” inquired Mr. Wilson pleasantly, after entering the presence.

“What old gentleman?” agreeably rejoined the representative of the “dear people.”

“Your Uncle Samuel,” responded the representative of pork, railroad and other interests in which it was a matter of no concern to him whether the “dear people” were interested or not.

The puzzled congressman was obliged to ask what his visitor meant, as Mr. Blazes did not recall having on his list of relations any uncle of that name.

“I refer,” explained Mr. Wilson smilingly, “to the personage known in our national history as Uncle Sam.”

“A-a-h,” assentingly said Mr. Swarth Blazes, somewhat at a loss, in the present turn of conversation, as to what else to say.

Mr. Wilson pompously proceeded:

"Your distinguished relative, I understand, is not well—suffering from indigestion of the treasury," the Chicagoan's face was solemn.

Swarth perceived the dawn of a joke.

"He," continued Mr. Wilson, "should be treated to a little financial blood letting. Phlebotomy, financial phlebotomy, my dear Blazes, is what he needs."

The member laughed heartily, and exclaimed in his delight:

"Nothing better in Mark Twain,—'indigestion of the treasury'—'financial phlebotomy!' " little minute guns of quotations from his rich friend, on the part of Mr. Blazes, enabling the latter to call up his ready reserves for the balance of the interview.

"We want that bill, this session," said unctious Mr. Wilson.

"Um," doubtfully replied perplexed Mr. Blazes.

"No," said the positive Mr. Wilson, "not 'um,'—the one——"

"Yes, yes," hastily assented his companion, for the committee clerk had entered the room, where the two were occupied, and was respectfully waiting to speak to the member. "What is it, Brant?" asked the congressman.

"Mrs. Walker!" responded the man.

"I'll see her presently."

The clerk withdrew.

"I know, my dear fellow," resumed the member, when he and Mr. Wilson were alone, "all about that bit of financial blood letting," and the two joined in justly merry, care-free laughter, that would have pleased Mr. Blazes' honest constituency, mightily; "but there is something in my other interests before the house—before congress, you know,—I may say, I have some old

back numbers,—ahem!—fellow's waited until, I expect, he's a little in need of the money involved in the measure."

"What has that to do with me?" demanded Wilson.

"His case has been hanging fire for some years," the congressman coughed deprecatingly behind his hand, "and I wouldn't be at all surprised, as it is a just claim, if he would not expect, some day, to have it passed. It has been passed," remarked the witty legislator at this point, "but mostly by. My powers of securing legislation, like a majority of us, are limited. If I give them to you, the other fellow gets nothing. He, really, you know, ought to have the right of way, sometime."

"Do you mean to sidetrack us for him?" glowered Wilson.

"Oh, dear no,—not in the least; do not think such a thing for an instant, Mr. Wilson,—not for the world. You do me a great injustice, indeed you do."

The groveling of the free American spirit was much appreciated by the porkman.

"Will we get that bill?"

"Oh, yes."

"And now about that tariff schedule: Do we get protection?"

Blazes assured the helpless "infant industry" that everything was "all fixed."

"Well, see that it is," Wilson said bluntly. "We pay enough to elect you fellows." Then Mr. Wilson smiled, fatly.

"Tip you gave us on stocks. Same place—same way—your share. Satisfactory?" and Mr. Wilson beamed both fatly and glowingly.

"You bet," replied Mr. Blazes, with enthusiasm.

Mr. Wilson retired; strutted through the capitol; menaced the peace of society; cast covetous and amorous

eyes upon Mary Walker's daughter, Mona, whom he saw, but did not know, and, at last, went to Chicago, where he belonged and, doubtless, ought to stay.

Jason Jump, on reaching the door of the committee room which he sought, inquired of a doorkeeper in attendance if the man, in whose quest the former editor was there, was within and could be seen. It had reached the stage, in Jason's case, when the people's representative, being called on by a relic of the past, is usually "not in," and it was, in all likelihood, a fortunate chance for Jason that the door of the committee room happened to be open and that his congressman, in range of vision, sat within. The committee was not in session.

"Come in Jump," called the member, refreshed after his recent important conference with Mr. Wilson, and reclining, with an expressive leg on a committee-room table, comfortably and indolently in a big arm chair. Mr. Blazes waved two fingers, between which rested a cigar, negligently in the direction of his caller.

The claimant entered, stood silently before Mr. Swarth Blazes, at the familiar, long, green-cloth-covered-top, committee-room table on which rested Mr. B's leg, and finally spoke.

"Can I see you in private?" he asked quietly.

A few of the interesting moments assigned to our valued public servants had been spent, by Mr. Blazes, in noting the fact that his caller's shirt was clean, and the likelihood of the claimant wanting a loan correspondingly diminished. There were present, in the committee room, besides Jason's member, one or two other congressional pillars of a free country strengthening the scene in like manner of graceful abandon employed by Mr. Swarth Blazes. Considering the lazy, cynical and coldly indifferent curiosity of these last named indispensable aids to human society, and, after a final scrutiny of his

caller, satisfied on the general question of a loan, Jump's pillar took his own leg down from the table, straightened a little in his chair, cleared his throat importantly and answered,

"Why, why,—ye-es, if——"

"Well, it is—most important," rejoined the visitor, a trifle irritably, and anticipating the other's objections and waving them aside with a weary gesture of the hand.

The member of the national assembly rose reluctantly, as if unwilling to squander valuable time spent in the beloved nation's service and the, certainly, equally highly essential enjoyment of a cigar, and led the way to a private room. The walls and ceilings of the large apartment they here entered, like those of the first room and other parts of the great building, were bright with gilding and color, the floor was soft with rich carpet, the furniture massive. Here, Jason Jump, seated opposite to Mr. Blazes, stared vacantly, for a space, into the plainly disconcerted countenance of the congressman. The costly clock provided for the precious moments of congressional time by an appreciative government and a few equally appreciative and unselfish merchant philanthropists ticked with painful distinctness in the growing silence. The Honorable Swarth Blazes fidgeted—perhaps an undignified thing for the Honorable Swarth to do, but the truth of history compels the admission that he did it.

Mr. Swarth Blazes, seeing the other either would not or could not open the trying interview, finally in self defense was obliged to do so, himself.

"Your claim," said he, presently, "does not seem to get on." He caught a peculiar glitter in the eyes of his follower, as he uttered this short speech.

It passed through the mind of the harassed and tor-

tured visitor, that he could kill this man sitting there! How long now had it been since the latter had begun to play the once influential editor for political gain? Jason Jump did not remember. "His claim did not seem to get on!" It would presently be, "Well, we'll put it through next session," and "next session," like "tomorrow," never came.

"No," said the constituent, "it does not seem to get on." His voice sounded hoarse—he moistened his lips; thought of the mother and daughter he had just left; thought of a night of sleepless despair and remorse over the failures of his own past life, which he himself had just passed following his interview with the cattle trader; thought of the future. "No," he repeated with an effort, "it does not seem to get on." Helplessly, with his shaking hand, he dashed the perspiration from his brow. He had come here to tell this man the awful truths of the hour. How was it to be done; and if done what would it amount to? How weak, powerless, impotent he seemed.

"Is there anything more I can do for you?" queried Swarth Blazes, stifling a yawn with the tips of his fingers.

"I think," observed the other smilelessly, "you have about done for me, already. There was a time when you could have done everything for me—a time, when, long ago, I allowed myself to be drawn into this by your assurances; spending a fortune; wrecking my life, and killing my wife with the heartbreak of it all; a time when you could have either helped me, or told me my efforts were useless—when you sacrificed me, that you might, by seeming to serve me, secure the political support of my friends. There was a time when you could have treated me as honor, duty and friendship alike dictate—a time when, I now know, you betrayed me and

IN FAVOR OF THOSE WHOSE CLAIMS WERE A TISSUE OF INJUSTICE AND FRAUD. Stay, hear me out!" continued his visitor in a low, intense voice, as Blazes, his face resembling his name, started; and there was now and had been steadily growing in Jason Jump something that compelled the other to listen. "Your selfishness has been my undoing—selfishness now growing in the high places of the earth until our ideals are but sun flashes in the fog; and the well meaning, lost in the deep waters off the coast of government, find themselves wrecked upon the rocks of retaliation and crime. I am going home—home!" he laughed wildly.

"Come, come, Jump!" exclaimed Blazes, in not only an instinct of alarm blended with his anger, but in one of habitual prompting to faithless political temporizing, as well.

"Jump me no Jumps!" thundered and flamed the injured and defrauded constituent springing to his feet, and towering over his startled representative. "The truth! Can you give me justice?"

"I cannot," said the congressman, surprised into telling the truth.

"Then God help you and me!" cried the other, as he turned and left the room.

"What's the matter, Blazes?" asked a friend, upon Blazes' return to the adjoining apartment.

"Oh," said Mr. Blazes lightly, "only a crazy claimant."

Retribution! upon one and all—upon government for unfettered and reckless men and women and children, as they fly by day and night throughout the space about us.

CHAPTER III.

"THE RATS LEAVE THE SHIP."

"We wish to see Mrs. Walker," Jason Jump was speaking, at the door of a neglected and ill looking house not far from the capitol.

"Come in," replied the slatternly female servant who had answered the bell.

Jump and the counsellor of his revolt entered the place, where the object of their call was to be found. It was a mean, second-class rooming-house they were in. Nostril and eye were alike greeted with the unsavory evidences of the habitation of the congressional poor. Age was rifling the walls of paper; the furniture of upholstery, and the atmosphere, saturated with ancient mustiness and time worn odors, of purity to the point of decay and dissolution. These things will annoy congress some day and it will have them removed—a mere annoyance!

Jump's companion sniffed the situation with little apparent relish.

"Why," he exclaimed cynically, "do you want to help them?"

"The woman—Mrs. Walker—and her daughter—Mona?" responded Jason mechanically. "I am still a man. Our bargain—you remember, Brad, safe—safe and respectable employment!"

"Oh," said the other carelessly, flicking the ash from a piece of cigar he held in his hand, "I'll stand by my agreement with you."

"Good," said the betrayed government applicant.

Mary Walker at this moment appeared. She looked pale and worried.

Jason advanced, extended his hand and smiled.

"Did you see Blazes?" he asked pointedly.

"Oh! Mr. Jump, yes; cannot we leave Washington—leave it forever?" cried the woman excitedly.

"And Blazes——?"

"Cannot we leave Washington?" is all she could be brought to say.

Jason Jump looked at her keenly.

"Forever—forever," she repeated eagerly.

"And," commented the already disappointed claimant, gravely, "is it, indeed, that bad?"

"That bad and worse," and she burst into tears.

After struggling with her emotion for a moment, the distressed woman went on more quietly:

"I am homeless—I am, I was about to say, friendless; but I feel gratefully sure, Mr. Jump, that you are my friend."

Jump muttered something which sounded like,

"Whatever else I am, I am that!"

But the object of his interest seemed to take no notice and hurried on.

"Except for Mona," she said, pathetically and wistfully looking into Jason Jump's sympathetic face, "I am alone. She and her father, now dead, made up my—our—existence. Selfishly, this man here—" she avoided mention of a name—"selfishly, this man here would play me false. He was to have secured *me*, not my daughter, a position—work. He insists on the place being given to Mona. I am perfectly competent—capable; he will not give me the place—he will not explain. I am desperate. He will not help me. He owes it to the memory of his friend, my dead husband, to do so. He was greatly aided, by Col. Walker while alive, in his

present political fortunes. Col. Walker, you know, Mr. Jump," said the wife simply, "was a good soldier."

"I knew your husband, and of his friendship for—the man," interjected Jump. "He was a brave officer."

"You knew him," said the woman, "but not me."

"Not till I met you here, after he died," said Jason.

"This—man," continued Mrs. Walker—

They had been seated—Jason Jump, Simons and the widowed applicant—and the old and insecure chair, on which the bulky figure of Brad Simons had been resting, suddenly as the sitter tilted back gave way, precipitating the occupant sprawling upon the floor. The catastrophe, under other and less trying circumstances, would have been ludicrous enough and productive of an explosion of mirth, but, at this stage of her experience and suffering, it but intensified and brought into greater relief the painfully sordid and humiliating situation of the unhappy female.

In his surprise, Simons involuntarily uttered an oath; apologized; got upon his feet; ruefully examined the broken chair, and politely selected another and a safer and firmer seat. Mrs. Walker, whose overwrought nerves had already brought her to a state closely bordering upon hysteria, once more broke into tears; and Jason Jump silently anathematized congress, the government, the president of the United States, the various governors of the same, and "all others in authority."

After her second attack of chagrin and grief had, with the woman, in a measure subsided, Jump spoke soothingly and encouragingly.

"I have brought a friend," said Jason indicating Brad Simons, to whom, since their entrance, Mrs. Walker had been but formally introduced,—“a friend. To leave you here is now, of course, impossible. Mr. Simons will tell you."

"Mr. Jump and I have arranged," said Simons evenly, "if you will go, to take you and your daughter away with us. She, as well as yourself, will be assured of a means of support." Brad Simons waited.

The woman had never met Simons before the present visit. However, she knew Jason Jump well, and felt justified in trusting him fully.

She hesitated.

"I—I know no other way." Mona's mother struggled with herself—paused. "What can we do! give us a little time—oh, we can do nothing but accept."

"Then," exclaimed Brad Simons cheerfully, "let that be settled."

"It is settled," said Jason Jump.

The capitol, in brooding and solemn majesty, still sat stately and silent upon the hill, when the two men came forth from the woman's dwelling place; it did not totter—it did not collapse and its walls crash in and grind each other into dust—a dust to mercifully rise above the wreck of sweet good faith to cloud and hide the grinning and diabolical features of selfish and distorted evil ever lurking behind society's humane edifice of alluring promise, security and hope.

Not long after these happenings, there suddenly and unannounced appeared in the midst of an unorganized and lawless country element, in a disturbed locality of the State of Indiana, a mysterious and unknown character, strange and dominating to the duller and less acute faculties of those with whom he seemed to have been already prepared to cast his lot. The disorderly and disconnected outrages which, previously to the stranger's coming, these unruly spirits had been accustomed to perpetrate at random intervals upon the so called better ordered portions of society were speedily welded and

united, by this sinister and unwelcome stranger, into an organized and continuous unity. He had come among ignorant and unlettered off-scourings of a primitive region; and soon, by profound craft and cunning, easily subdued his crude and undeveloped associates to the entire and complete mastership of his iron and inflexible will. He was gifted with a singular intelligence, which would have been called commanding intellect under any other guise than that of a seemingly uncouth, uncultured countryman. The newcomer was apparently uneducated—a coarse-fibered fellow—the male, brutal, primal—in all, save concern for the female.

CHAPTER IV.

“THE OTHER WOMAN IN THE CASE.”

The child, at last, was born. The breathless world had waited—that is, the breathless little world of the obscure country folk way down in Indiana. And it was a fine girl. Old Doctor Swathburn, who had invariably presided over the introduction of worthy members of society into the world on like interesting occasions—and given calomel and herbs to every patient in the section of country his duties had covered—for a quarter of a century, congratulated the country people, man and wife, on the happy and successful outcome, and smiled, as was his custom, benignantly and cheerfully whenever opportunity offered. The genial old physician was beloved, respected and trusted by everyone, although quite indifferent and callous to all ideas of modern advancement, viewing the aggravating and vexing innovations of his brother practitioners as not only infringements upon his own rights and privileges but upon right and justice in the abstract. The young lady, for whose enticing appearance upon the scene of our story we are, in part, indebted to the amiable offices of benevolent Doctor Swathburn, at the early period of her first entrance into this life found herself, though it may be unconsciously, projected into this very atmosphere of opposition to the enlightened, more humane and more sensible methods of doing things. The face set sternly against advancement is not new. The child, one day grown older, was to demand a better understanding and enlightenment of “old fogysm.” Extending to all

professions—to that of law, of education, of religion—her life was destined to have, in the groping darkness of the environment of her birth, a fitting note, as it were, of initiation.

We do not want to advance; we want to sit still—enjoy old bigotry and conditions. The railroad will take us to the Sea of Galilee, and we feel, somehow, that we have committed sacrilege beyond redemption when the brakeman puts his head in the car door and shouts, “Nazareth—all off,” now don’t we? Pride of conviction brooks no correction. However, it is one of the exquisite sacrifices demanded of us, that we give up the old for the new. With our pride in the past taxed by our untried faith in the future, the surrender of long established beliefs offers, perhaps, the one great problem of our lives. Could we but graciously accept the inevitable degree of necessary relinquishment involved in all development, happiness were assured.

The child was like any other child—it was born; it was brought into life with the same old questions as regards a state of previous being and one hereafter, and it required the same old general diet—milk. It was pink, as usual, in color, and called for the same old attentions, in the infantile and maternal matter of diminutive articles of attire, that the institution of babydom has rendered hoary and reverend throughout the ages. It was a good baby—so its mother would have us believe—it did not cry (very often), and was surprisingly intelligent—it looked at you out of its eyes! All these things marked it as worthy of remark and stamped it as remarkable. The little thing did not, so far as we may here give out, know that it had a large share of trials awaiting it in the new world into which it had been ushered; and we feel an ever increasing reluctance to needlessly darken the atmosphere of this period of its

life, with any form of religious or social skepticism or doubt. That the hidden and unexplored future had in store its own portion of cares for the wee mite—the tiny wayfarer—might not be denied; but that we should, for any cause whatsoever, be obliged to view the conditions of its existence, either at any time before its coming, or now, or hereafter, in any other than an unquestioningly and absolutely hopeful and cheerful sense may be doubted, the matter dismissed and the little one permitted to go to sleep.

After the child got a bit older, it was christened in a church. It was called Delia, the surname being Brad-dock. The name Delia soon became abbreviated to De, and De she was always called. When the baby grew up it developed originality; and it is here we have an unavoidable duty to perform concerning the reader's interest before proceeding further into the really entertaining, exciting and thrilling narrative we have to relate.

Let it first be clearly understood that I do not deny the essential truth of Scriptures; but rest upon their implied if not literal promise of a new dispensation, and in the blessed assurance of their power to "bind and loose."

About the first thing the age, following the teachings of the Christian Era, fastens upon a child—causes it, indeed, to fully realize—is Fear,—the attempt is even gravely made to control infant love through fear, and the amazing and eminently fitting and proper result is productive of profound edification! The first worthy lessons, in the divinely beautiful atmosphere of home, are Fear of Parental Punishment; The Dark Room, with its nameless, unreal, soul inspiring horrors, and, last but not least, the carefully instructed, entrancing and trembling fright of the childish monster of iniquity in the

face of God Almighty. Perhaps, it has not yet occurred to us to endeavor to inculcate virtue only for virtue's sake, unselfishness only for unselfishness' sake, truth only for truth's sake,—but we do it in cringing cowardice and terror, where principle alone for principle's sake has no part; and what a field of fruitful perfection and soul satisfying wisdom is bountifully provided!

We are unhappily yet the unjust and slavish subjects of the prejudices and effects of mortal fear and frenzied dread derived from our earliest and most impressionable period—childhood. We are still controlled in the supreme rule and even in the superstition of religion's abhorrent precept of eternal punishment supported by the commands and teachings of a zealous and unquestioning church, which employs fear for its ruling force. This is our measure of delicious happiness, joy, and All-Love!—You, crippled and stunted in your mind and heart from birth, have had this to contend with; I have had it; we all have walked maimed and shorn of our natural rights and stature in the hardening and toiling if necessary past. It is, therefore, not wonderful that little De should have the same conditions beset her own baby way; and, in after years, should find her soul recoil from the hideous attempt to make eternal—make earthly life conform to such unheard of present seeming absurdities and impossibilities.

She signaled her advent into the growing stages of small girlhood by a singularly keen and intelligent view of the situation. The infallible kindness of motherly love, upon one occasion under the rule of fear, had inflicted the usual punishment for some minor offense that might have gone without chastisement altogether had it but received the attention it alone merited. The parent being promptly and truthfully informed, by her helpless offspring, that her mother would not do such things if she

were not "the biggest," in a further burst of rapturous affection locked the dangerous and menacing character in a dark closet. De is reported as vowing she would never come out any more. And, in all likelihood, she never would have done so had not a gleam of intelligence appeared, after a while, to take possession of the brain of her well meaning though misguided parent, who went to the closet in time to get the child down from an attempt to hang itself. The youthful mind had just realized the result of coming into such a world, and had lost no time in evincing a surprising though mistaken desire of getting out of it. The surpassing beauties of "spare the rod and spoil the child" were thus made duly manifest. De, however, an exception to the majority, was not made viciously deceitful by such training; and fared on to the end with the nobility and native truth of her character unspoiled by the ordinarily fatal mistakes of "bringing up."

Punishment makes wrong, not right.

Child slavery, the rule of the weak by the strong, the oppression of the young by their forebears and those in authority, exists in other and far more reprehensible and hurtful forms than those of the mills and the mines.

After awhile De grew to be quite a girl. The farm interested her; she made effort to be obedient, and her parents had little cause to complain. She displayed a tendency, however, to learn in other fields. She was an apt scholar in the neighborhood country school; and so apparent was her disposition to acquire knowledge, that, in the unlettered minds of her parents, it early became a curious subject of discussion what to do with her. The father and mother had lived on their farm all their lives; were, in their way, conscientious and God fearing. If they, themselves, were possessed of the advantages of any schooling, those advantages consisted of the most

primitive and elementary kind, and the results embraced the possible ability, after a fashion, to read, write and cipher. This is a tale of the simplest elements of life, those from which the fabric of existence is constructed as the clay image is molded out of the primeval loam. At the very threshold of learning, how could Mother Braddock and old Uncle Peter know, appreciate or realize that their child might have leanings to things of another world than theirs—the world of modern thought and enlightenment? But De had just these leanings. The old people, with their prejudices, had to give way, and De went to a more advanced medium of education than that afforded by the simple system in operation at the little country schoolhouse near the old homestead. Notwithstanding, the difference between the country schoolhouse and the new school was not so great; and her surroundings at the small neighboring town, where her search for knowledge had placed her, continued to be of the humblest. She was, however, bright, quick and intelligent; and soon began to be looked upon as something of a prodigy. Such instructions as she obtained were entirely non-sectarian. The earlier neighborhoods, in rural localities, possessed, kindly to a free intellect, few other educational advantages. She was reared, so far as religion went, in the faith of her parents. Her mother and her father became Methodists when their mothers and their fathers brought them, as infants, into the world; as her grandmother and her grandfather and a dim line of ancestors had borne Methodism with them. De began with the Methodists; but, by and by, startled her shocked and scandalized neighbors and family by becoming a Catholic—a Roman Catholic. In De’s time, the ignorant bigotry and superstition of all sects viewed with horror, hatred and exclusion—really, three sacred and holy principles to employ in the fraternity and

brotherhood of Christ (?)—viewed with horror, hatred and exclusion each and every other's creed and sect. De, as a Roman Catholic, was finally accepted by her family and friends; for, after the manner of existing humankind, she was beloved by all; but there was something strange about the girl that few could understand, and which caused her many times to be viewed, by old Peter and Martha Braddock, with puzzled interest and grave speculation.

And so De, with her originality and the thousand and one things it implied, was destined to become a very remarkable "other woman in the case."

CHAPTER V.

BRAD SIMONS AND DE BRADDOCK.

Brad Simons was an older man than De Braddock was a woman; and occasioned some comment when it appeared that he had fallen in love with her. It was when De came out of school that it became apparent Brad was bent on marrying her. She certainly did not favor his suit. Her father was always impressed with Brad's bank account; while Martha Braddock as strongly sympathized with her child. Simons stood high in the community and gave no cause of question or suspicion. He was thrifty, and at all times found means to impress his neighbors and companions favorably. He appeared to attend strictly to his own affairs which were large; and even Bob Likkum, who disliked him, failed to find specific reason for his dislike save in Simons' unconcealed disposition to drive the closest possible bargains, at any cost and at all seasons, in business. Brad often came to see De, not directly, but upon a pretense of visiting Peter Braddock, her father, on farm or cattle matters, or to gossip with Martha, her mother, when Peter was in the field.

The rural locality occupied by these people had, over a lengthy period of time, been scourged by upsparring and malignant lawlessness which, for some mysterious reason, was now on the increase; cattle stealing and various depredations being of more frequent and common occurrence. Enlightened detection was but just

beginning to glimmer; together with the appearance of the first ditching machine, the reaper and the mower.

"Mother," Peter would sometimes say, "ye'd oughtn't to let De, er ye'd oughtn't yerself, go out alone in the kentry so much; send ur take Esau weth ye. Ye never know whut mout happen."

And Mother Braddock would laugh and reply:

"The gal an' me might be old enough by now, father, to take keer uv ourselves. Drat that Esau!" exclaimed mother, her tone changing to one of good natured railery; "he'd be 'bout 'smuch good ez a suckin' calf. Ef anythin' happened, he'd want ter come hum right away an' git somep'n' t' eat," the last being an expression of deep disgust, referring to an abnormal and incurable physical appetite belonging to the young and ingenuous farm assistant in question.

However, so far, no indications had occurred that the secret purposes of the outlaws had, in any way, become involved with the lives or other affairs of the Braddock household; and the sky of its daily routine had remained clear. But the usual cloud no bigger than a man's hand was just about showing in the domestic horizon.

"Mother," said Peter, one day, "I've lost two head uv them there blooded cattle down in the medder."

"Them band uv thieves," exploded Mrs. Braddock.

"Think likely," said the old man.

De, standing by, interposed firmly:

"It's high time something was done to break up that organization of shame and disgrace to this community. It seems to be growing worse instead of better. It's an outrage, father, on law and decency."

"They be afeerd uv 'em," observed Peter Braddock.

"They—who?" inquired his daughter.

"Why, da'ter, ter tell the truth," replied the old man, perplexedly scratching his head, "everybody—

they ain't none but whut hez, ez the feller sez, a hulsome an' superstishus dread uv 'em."

"Are you that way?" asked De, with a show of growing spirit.

"Now, see here, da'ter," rejoined the father, "ye mustn't be too hard on the ol' feller—that's me, yer daddie; but, I tell ye, gal, I've seen 'smuch uv their doin's, I hev', 'at I don't know ef I ain't 'bout 'sbad ez the balance, w'en 'tcomes to tacklin' 'em—them thieves an' cutthroats. They's some kind uv a sayin' goin' aroun,' that the gang's led by someun'—don't know who—'at's hed some trouble—th' law's done 'im some dirt—onjestice er other—an' they're jes' nach'ly a-gittin' even like. Don't know," concluded Uncle Peter shaking his head sadly.

"H-e-l-l-o, P-e-t-e-r," called a voice from the road.

"There's Brad—Brad Simons; 'u'd know 'is voice anyw'eres," and, with this observation, Peter hurried out of the house.

"What does he want with father, I wonder, mother," remarked De as the old farmer went quickly out of the room.

"Dunno, child," replied Mrs. Braddock indulgently.

"Hi, Peter," said Simons accosting Braddock, as the latter came from the house; "understand you've lost some cattle lately. That true?"

"That be about right, Brad, I have," returned the farmer walking up to the fence, on the other side of which, in the road, Brad Simons sat upon a large bay horse. "Wisht I know'd where they wuz, I do."

"How many'd you lose?" further questioned the friendly disposed horseman.

"Two—only two, but them's enuff," rejoined Peter Braddock disconsolately. "And th' way that 'air dang gang's a-goin' on, in this here kentry, weth other things

belonging to everybody, it's likely to be lots more, 'fore they git through. They're a bad lot, Brad, 'n' murder 's not past 'em. Fu'st trouble they've giv' me, tho'."

"And the last, if I can put a stop to it," replied Brad sympathetically, and with a peculiar emphasis which escaped Uncle Peter's attention at the time.

Peter Braddock said nothing. He, of course, had no reason for visiting the man before him with the faintest shadow of suspicion or distrust concerning the general wrongdoing under discussion and prevalent in that vicinity. In fact, whatever was Simons' knowledge of the doings of the freebooters, the cattle trader had been ignorant of any designs upon old Braddock, or with his own interest in and a certain respect he cherished for De he had refused to countenance them. Presently, as Brad continued to sit upon his horse in silence and as though lost in thought gaze off in the distance, Peter said he was "very much obleeged fur his good will, and would Simons git down an' kum in?"

"No, not now; but, Peter, that matter I was speaking to you about—about De, you know,—well," and the man showed a conscious awkwardness as he twisted his horse's bridle rein, "you see,—well," clearing his throat, "I'd like to find out, don't you know, what De, herself, might think of——"

"Yer marryin' 'er?" quizzed the other, with a little pang, helping the backward swain out. "Ask 'er, Brad. Ye kin soon tell, then. We sot a mighty store by De, we do, mother an' me, but ef ye kin make the gal happy, we mustn't stan' in th' way of a free ch'ice. Ast 'er, Brad, ast 'er."

"Thank you, Peter, thank you," replied Simons, seemingly relieved; "I will. I know there's a difference in our ages—quite a difference, in fact; but I honestly do not see how that should stand in the way. I am rid-

ing on a piece, and I'll kindo' look in as I'm coming back. What say?"

"So do, Brad, so do," rejoined the old man with a touch of kindly heartiness not unmixed, however, with a hint of sadness in his voice; "always glad ter welcome ye, ye know that."

Brad touched up his horse and with an expression of thanks passed on up the road.

In their domestic council chamber, Uncle Peter and mother had decided to give the matter of Mr. Simons' fate entirely into the hands of De herself. So the resigned farmer stood and watched the cattle merchant ride away.

"Maybe, it's best fur the gal,—maybe 'tis,—but she's our da'ter," and now there were real tears in the old father's keen, dark, expressive eyes and in his voice, too. "He's mighty well off, though," and the hard-fisted tiller of the soil made an effort to satisfy his rebellious heart with this commonly unfailing recourse; but he found it unusually difficult to bring relief to-day. "Maybe," he muttered wistfully, struggling to recover his self composure,—“maybe, it's fur the best.”

Peter Braddock kept what had passed between himself and Brad Simons in the road that day, affecting the imminence and seriousness of Brad's views regarding Peter's child, carefully within the privacy of his own breast; not even telling "mother;" and purposely avoiding any mention of it to De herself.

He went into the house.

"What'd Brad want, paw?" asked Martha Braddock.

"Oh, was sorry I'd lost them cattle and said, if he could do anything to help me git 'em er stop the stealin', he would." Brad's manner had intentionally left old Peter under the impression that the cattleman would be

useful not only in stopping further thefts but in recovering the property already stolen.

De, in all innocence, was obliged to admit that this was kind of Brad whose own large dealings in cattle might enable him to serve them most effectively.

If Peter Braddock was keeping his own counsel, so was Brad Simons.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COUNTRY SCHOOLHOUSE.

"You are the new teacher, I believe?" said De Braddock to a tastefully dressed and pretty young woman with a suit of wonderful gold bronze hair, at the town of T——, one day, as the two passed out of the postoffice together.

The person addressed looked inquiringly at her questioner.

"I am De Braddock," said De simply. "I understood they had a new teacher in our neighborhood—our farm lies near the school."

"Yes?" replied De's companion smilingly. "I am," she went on freely, for she had been pleasantly impressed by the other's frank and open face, "what you would call a teacher; and," she added, with a little laugh, "maybe, 'new,' in more senses than one. I am teaching, for the first time. I hope I'll suit."

"Oh," rejoined De, impulsively liking the girl, "I'm sure you will."

"The last teacher, I believe, was rather a hard taskmaster and the scholars drove him off, did they not?" queried the fresh aspirant to the instructor's role.

"They'll like you, though," said De.

"I have not been here long," continued the young teacher; "and I am very glad to meet people. We have

just come from Washington—mother and I. My name is Mona Walker.”

Mona Walker—had the shadowy shapes of Jason Jump’s haunting past of injustice, in the person of the girl whom he had rescued from the dangerous moral sway of Swarth Blazes, fallen thus early across the unexplored path of De Braddock’s life! And, with the drifting appearance of these shapes, there came an echo as from some lingering and sorrowful melody dying away in mournful memories of other days. Would the once saddened strains of times gone by blend, without discord, with the more cheerful harmonies of the present?

Mona Walker’s existence had been one of quiet, simple, unassuming devotion to her mother—to her home ties—different, in this respect, from no average in the vast body of humankind. Were it not, as Lord Byron has said, that the history of any life, however obscure and commonplace, may if properly recounted be made interesting, how few of us would offer matter of sufficient importance or concern to occupy an idle moment. Mona was scarcely out of her teens; but, with the moving, ever stirring, ever struggling stream of humanity, she had to work. From man, woman or child, is the load of labor and conscious or unconscious responsibility never lifted. We can but try to lighten the burdens of them we love! Mona Walker, as she was at Washington, was still the one companion of her mother—widowhood, the fatherless and affection inseparably binding together the daughter and the parent. The latter, upon the arrival in Indiana, had accepted an offer, on the part of Brad Simons, to take charge of his housekeeping; and the two—Mona and her mother—lived upon Simons’ farm. The widow would gladly have given the daughter independence had she been able. She was not. The offspring, as did the parent, contributed her portion to the

common support; and, following an arrangement which Jason Jump had furthered, and happily freed from the menace at Washington, entered cheerfully upon the discharge of her simple duties as teacher in the little country school in De Braddock's neighborhood.

De said she would be glad to make Miss Walker acquainted with her own friends and those surroundings with which one placed in the position of the new instructress would have to become familiar; and the two at once entered upon a footing of agreeable and neighborly friendship.

Before they separated, Mona Walker's new friend remarked:

"We have, at our house, the biggest goose of a fat farmboy—Esau is his name. He is such a big, good natured fellow, that you can't help taking an interest in him. There's one thing about him," said De in explanation: "Where everyone, in this region, seems afraid as death of the outlaws—you haven't heard of them? they're dreadful—where everyone seems afraid as death of them, why, Esau does not appear to mind them any more than if they did not exist. He's very ignorant, though, and I should like for him to study with you."

"The outlaws! are there outlaws?" queried Mona Walker anxiously.

"Oh, yes," responded De Braddock easily, displaying one of her own leading characteristics—an indifference to fear. "Can you take Esau?"

"I will do the best for him, Miss Braddock, that I can."

"Oh, thank you," rejoined De gratefully.

It happened, in this way, that Esau, the Braddock farmboy, was afforded facilities for acquiring an education; and, for the remnant of the school year, during

that spring, could be seen drooping in fat and laborious effort over a desk in the country schoolroom.

The school year had not yet expired, although the hot weather had set in, and school, to be sure, was a blazing and monstrous abuse to any youngster who, desk-bound, could smell the woods and dream of diving holes, yet could see, nor feel, neither. Horrible!

A little country frame schoolhouse, by the roadside, with a wide piece of unfenced, hazel-bush-sprinkled door-plot between the front door and the highway; the children, from the adjacent farms, with slates and books—some earnest and brisk, in the cooler, early morning, others lagging lazily with tardy step, or scurrying and romping blithely and merrily through the fields, or bursting with shouts out of nearby woods; the teacher, in her unassuming dress, quietly entering the door of the modest and unpretentious house of learning—these were some of the varied objects and occurrences, which, sometime after De and Mona met in T——, caused a stocky built, powerful, black-bearded man to stop and speak gruffly to a girl about ten years of age, who stood gazing with childish interest at the sports of the other children.

“I say, sis, where’s yer teacher?” asked the man.

The child, as children will, stood spellbound by something in the other’s manner hard to define, but which conveyed a species of creeping terror with it—a subtle and unaccountable threat of lurking danger. Her gruff questioner watched the child’s speechless countenance until evil patience became exhausted, and made a menacing gesture as if to force his unwilling subject to answer him. The child shrank away in fear, and a fat boy of seventeen, who sat on a stump a little way off from where the child and man were standing, called out,

“You leave her alone.”

The fellow, wearing a beard, turned in the direction

of the voice, and, perceiving the lad on the stump, forced a deep scowl to his features.

"Sonny, ye know whut the ol' hen said to the pullet, when the little chicken went out where the fox wuz?" asked the man smoothly and darkly.

"No," said the boy doggedly.

"'Ye're crazy ez a loon,' that's w'at she said. Now, miss," to the little girl, "I ain't a-goin' to hev' people, in these here parts, a-refusin' what I wants." He caught and shook the child, though not severely. The little girl began to whimper. The fat boy rolled off the stump, onto his feet. "Where," the examiner again asked of the small girl, "is yer teacher?"

The fat youngster, in clumsy haste, waddled over to the rear of the persecutor of his little companion-pupil.

"Leave 'er be," said the boy.

"Oh, *you*, ag'in," retorted the man wheeling quickly on his opponent. "Thought I told ye—git out," kicking suddenly at the fat boy.

The latter lumberingly dodged and escaped infliction of the intended punishment. His assailant let loose of the little girl and started for the fat boy.

"Esau," piped the child, "he—he'll—kill us—he—he'll kill ye—o-o-o-h!" and, in real fright and aroused efforts at safety, the first object of the displeasure of the black-bearded man set up a wild and wailing shriek of distress and apprehension.

The man roughly caught Esau by the collar and shook him vigorously and noticeably with far more severity than that employed on the other sex.

"You quit that," gasped the fat boy.

At this instant the teacher appeared at the door of the schoolhouse, hurriedly brought hither by the pupil's cry of alarm for herself and concern for her young champion, Esau.

"What is it, Fanny?" called the teacher when, catching sight of the ruffian shaking her other charge, she ran swiftly out and up to the man, grasping him firmly by the arm.

"Stop that, this instant. What do you mean?" she demanded indignantly.

The stranger looked abashed as he dropped his hold on Esau and turned to the young woman.

"I meant no harm, mum—jes' stirrin' 'em up a bit—that's all."

"I allow no one to abuse my pupils, sir; do not ever do so again," returned the indignant young woman with flashing eyes and heaving breast. "Now what do you want here? Say it and begone."

His manner to this woman was all gentleness.

"Northin'—northin', miss," replied the other propitiatingly. "Jes'—well, I jes' stopped to—well,—" he removed his hat; rubbed his forehead; replaced his hat; looked long and searchingly into the face of the teacher Mona Walker, and abruptly turned and left her; moving heavily though rapidly down the road.

"Now, children, come into school," said Mona.

Sobbing and screwing her knuckles into her eyes, the small girl followed by the fat boy entered the schoolhouse in the wake of her guardian.

The man with the black beard walked on in silence for some time. At length he muttered as he gazed about upon the surrounding woods:

"She didn't know me. Didn't want her to—just wanted to see if she would; but it hurts, anyway. If *she* don't know me, the rest won't—no, the rest will not."

He slouched on and, arriving at a point in the high-road at a safe distance from the place of his recent experiences at the schoolhouse, he glanced around cautiously and whistled softly. From among the trees lin-

ing the roadside issued, as in response to a signal, a second man of as forbidding an appearance as the first.

"Where be t' others?" demanded the man who had whistled.

"Layin' back in th' woods," returned the other.

"Skin back—I'll foller," rejoined his companion shortly.

The last comer turned and disappeared in the thick growth of forest; and the man left behind paused a moment in the roadway, looking back in the direction whence he had come, with a searching and even longing gaze. The next instant he wheeled swiftly and entered the wood whither his late companion had gone.

He tore his way through the dry, rotten and tangled undergrowth, pushing aside obstructing branches of bushes and trees, until, when a hundred yards or more had been thus traversed, he came upon a rocky glen. Gathered here, in a hollow amidst huge boulders and the numerous objects of rough, broken forest existence, was a group of men—five or six—all bearing the same characteristics of ruffianly aspect which marked him of the black beard and the man who had recently met him in the road.

The newcomer, giving but a slight look of seeming scrutiny at the knot of ill favored figures assembled in his view, appeared to detach himself from any further interest in this portion of his surroundings and, with something like a sigh, seated himself upon the trunk of a decayed tree which had fallen, in its day, before the force and fury of the storm. Here he remained, moody and silent. The member of the group, who had just preceded the sitting figure hither, glanced significantly from the oblivious man to the others and, in low tones, observed:

"Ye know he's that way, at times. Git along. There's plenty to do," and waved them from the spot.

Silently and in seeming understanding of their duties, one after another they passed away among the rocks and trees, and left their late director alone with his strange companion who, apparently unconscious of all about him and wrapped in gloomy and solitary meditation, still sat on the rotten bole of the old tree.

"I sent th' letter ter White," said the other, approaching the lonely figure on the tree trunk.

"Good," returned the man addressed, without looking at his companion. "Foller the fellers. I'll stay here fur a spell. Meet me down th' road d'reckly."

"Is that all ye'd hev'?" queried the other man doubtfully.

"All jes' now, Hen," replied his companion, in the same manner of complete and somber abstraction that had possessed him since the affair at the schoolhouse.

With every appearance of the deepest and most perplexed reluctance and scanning the form upon the old tree in a baffled way, the dismissed seeker for information slowly departed.

"He's a good un', an' all thet," he muttered as he withdrew, "but I'd like to know more about him. Who is he?"

And the ruminating man in the wood, left behind to his solitude upon the tempest blasted tree, gave no answer to this question; but sat and watched the clouds sailing overhead above the open space of the forest; and ground his teeth; and cried out and writhed as one, in the trial of soul and spirit, cries out to the still and unresponsive void of the universe.

The shadows—the phantoms—were still abroad!

"Now, see here, Miss Mona, ye knows I'm not very

bright," said Esau at the school; and Mona was interrupted in an attempt to convey to the sluggish intellect of the fat country boy a measure of soothing falsehood affecting the possession, on the part of De Braddock's favorite, of brilliant talents, by the entrance of De herself.

"Esau, what is that word?" asked Miss Walker when she had greeted her visitor cordially—De, standing near the two, watching with some anxiety the hoped-for manifestation, by her charge, of ordinary human intelligence.

"Dunno," said Esau.

"You don't know! Why, Esau," urged Mona, "look at it." The farmboy stood crowded by the side of his teacher with his head down close to the book which, sitting at her desk overlooking the schoolroom full of scholars, Miss Walker held for Esau's inspection. "See—now, I spell it—d-r-i-v-e,—can you not tell? Why, what does Mr. Braddock do when he goes to town with you and the family, in the big wagon?"

"Raises thunder when the wimmen folks ain't ready in time." promptly responded Esau.

With a look of shocked amazement Miss Walker turned apologetically to De, when they both broke out laughing, the school, in various stages of hilarious treble, gleefully following suit.

"There, there, Esau," said the teacher kindly, while covering De's impulse of awkward embarrassment as best she could, "go to your place and study. Children, please keep order. Now, Miss Braddock——"

Both young women, at this moment, glanced simultaneously out of the window at sound of hoofbeats, in the road, breaking in unexpectedly upon Mona's intended remark.

"Why," exclaimed De, a blush, which did not escape

Mona's feminine observation, mantling her cheek, "there's William White!"

"There are two," said Mona with a curious interest.

"Mr. White is the younger, with light hair," remarked De, a little reserved. "The other——"

"Yes," interposed the young teacher,—"the other?"

"Oh," replied Mona's companion, "that is Parson Woods."

"Oh," said Mona.

The two horsemen, dismounting, entered the school-room.

"The new teacher," said the parson with the interest of a public responsibility in his manner, when De had introduced William White and the pastor to Mona Walker. "Glad to meet you. Stopped to see how you would be coming on in your new position."

Mona, with the feeling of curious and strange interest that had possessed her on her first glimpse, through the window, of the approaching horsemen, found herself engaged in animated and entertaining conversation with the preacher, a man of dark hair and eyes and smoothly shaven face. His age might have been about thirty-nine.

De and William left the schoolroom, and lingered in the open space without.

"De," said the man, "they say, since Brad Simons has returned from Washington, that—that—well, that you're—that he——"

"William, don't be silly. That, what?"

"They say——" stammered White apparently much embarrassed, and breaking off disconnectedly—"oh, if I was anything but a beggar of a writer——!"

"Well?"

"May I come over, this evening?" concluded the diffident wooer lamely and ingloriously.

De bit her lips, partly in disappointment, partly in pained amusement.

"Yes, William,—you're always welcome."

"Thank you," said William humbly.

The two men presently withdrew; the school hummed and buzzed at intervals as schools do, and was quickly quieted by the patient teacher as schools are, only to hum and buzz again; nature, without, called, in faint, far off cadences, from cool, green forest glades; the man, seated upon the bolt riven tree in the wood, continued to groan in the misery of his solitude, and the old world with its little beginnings making great endings went rolling on.

When William White, a talented character with a literary bent combined with a singular love of humanity, arrived at his dwelling place he was both puzzled and surprised as well as uncomfortably stirred to find awaiting him a wholly incomprehensible communication, which imperatively requested him to meet the unknown writer, that night, at a point known as "Lone Pine," in the hills. "*We have something to tell you 'bout De Braddock,*" the writer said.

The unsigned note, to one who had so recently shown the unmistakable evidence of a deep and sentimental interest in Peter Braddock's daughter, was a matter of unavoidable and strange anxiety and concern. William White had no enemies—at least, none that he then knew of—and he at once put aside all thought that this unaccountable and anonymous invitation could mean personal treachery to himself. Even were it so, De Braddock's possible welfare, to him, possessed far too deep an interest to admit of a moment's hesitation.

"I must go," mused White as he read the entire missive a second time. "And it says," he soliloquized gravely, "that I must go alone—and alone it shall be."

It was now close on to evening. Thinking, in spite of his confidence, that there might be possible need of a weapon, White slipped a revolver into his pocket; and completed further preparations for the coming adventure.

CHAPTER VII.

“THE WAY OF THE WORLD.”

“The way of the world—” way of the world;

Anywhere, anyhow, into it whirled!

Elsewhere had started that sullen and reactionary current of lawless social reprisal, the first seed and vital germ of all dreadful and unhappy revolution in nature. They were two low browed, evil visaged men who were talking with suspiciously dark and sinister earnestness, in the open country highway. One, black-bearded and menacing, had perched himself upon the top of a rail fence; the other stood, brooding and silent, on the ground nearby. The one on the fence had come out of his abstraction in the forest, where we left him; the man standing near still wore the appearance of discontented perplexity worn, by him, when the last to leave the leader in the wood.

“But I tell ye,” said the man on the ground, gloomily continuing their discussion in the grateful shade of an immense oak in their rear—for the sun was hot, “ye cain’t tell nothin’ ’bout it. Th’ woman’s playin’ some game. I tell ye, I don’t believe in her tantrums, nohow. Fact. She lets on to be sick, this here a-way, an’ then—whish!” exclaimed the speaker, expressively throwing out his hands, “she’s up an’ off like a scairt colt. Yo’ never can tell, I tell ye. She ain’t no more sicker’n you

er me. Ye say she wants ye to kidnap Billy White, an' bring 'im to the cave?"

"Yes. And supposin' she is puttin' on—supposin' she is—she's be'n useful to us, hain't she—and faithful, an' all that, hain't she? Yo' cain't tell nothin' about 'er, I'll agree; but she's be'n durn good to the gang, jus' the same," persisted the robber leader on the fence. "Uh course, too, I looks at the matter ez ye do, yerself, Hen: them thar' seemin' crazy people's curious kind uv cattle, an' she's a double dose of curious, anyway—crazy er sane. And then, again, sez I, what if she is puttin' on? Huh! She can't get the best of us." This last was said with all the affected confidence of veteran and successful crime, for these men were among the worst and most vicious criminals southern Indiana was ever afflicted with. "I kin take keer uv mese'f, thank ye. No, ef we kin obleege the ol' critter, let's do it. Git the feller White, 'at she wants, er says she wants, fer to see him so much, an' take 'im to the mother. She—I tell yo', Hen," said the speaker, abruptly breaking off in his sentence and displaying part of a real motive moving him to the contemplated action, "we'd better do this thing she wants; fur the old woman, whether she's weak in her upper story ur not, knows some things 'at you an' me, I think, could make a heap out of. Did yer hear her say she wuz fate?" jestingly added the man.

"Yes," replied the other, "I did; and ye know what she said?"

"Naw; let's hear," rejoined his associate, one hand ruffling his heavy black beard while the other extracted a watch from his pocket as he glanced at the time.

"I ast 'er why she wuz fate. She said bec'uz' half the time she didn't have no sense."

"Haw! haw! haw!" burst out the other—"don't

sound very crazy, does it?—Not’sandin’, be she sick er well, we gotter git Billy White inter thet cave,” and, thus asserting his authority, the man parted his huge, black mustache, spat reflectively into the road from the top rail of the stake-and-rider fence and idly kicked the rail beneath with the back of his heel. His companion, with his hands in his pockets, slouched in the midst of the ironweeds which filled up the angles in the fence, and said nothing.

The landscape consisted of rich farmland and hilly country. The two plotters, in their coarse attire, made natural figures for the varied background, with its stretches of woodland and a river shining here and there among the trees and in the broken rising ground. Not far off, to the left of the outlaws and in their rear, were a farmhouse and outhouses; and, behind the buildings, was a field of ripening wheat. The summer weather now set in was dry, hot and dusty; and it was clearly approaching a season of either severe drought or overwhelming flood.

The man on the fence spoke abruptly, accompanying his words with an expressive oath. He had been sunk in a characteristic fit of abstraction, and his manner changed strikingly as he came out of it.

“Fate!” he ejaculated in bitter irony. “It’s the way of the world to git what ye kin, an’ *any* way ye kin,” he added, with a deep and peculiar emphasis, “an’ I’m go’n’ to git it.”

“Ye ain’t a-goin’ to do White no harm, be ye?” questioned the man in the ironweeds, with what seemed an unexpected and unusual show of solicitude.

“Don’t know; ef he acts right, ’ull leave ’im ’lone.”

“I wouldn’t hurt ’im none,” urged the other, still apparently and curiously prompted by a strange weakness in the face of their proposed act of abduction.

"See here, Hen," growled the ruffian truculently from the top of the fence, "ye seem kindo' tender hearted. What ails ye? Ye don't play no tricks with us, my man, like we had to do up Thrash Thatcher fer—hey?" he added ominously.

"I tell ye, Hank," returned Hen breaking the top of an ironweed with one hand, while the other remained in his pocket, "I ain't feelin' jes' right lately 'bout all this here cave biz'ness, don't ye know. Don't know what ails me, but I ain't, an'——" he broke off uneasily for a moment; then proceeded: "Like ez not we'll all git drowned in there some day fer our pains. Hank, it's darn bad biz'ness, anyhow—this breakin' the law."

"One 'u'd think," sneered Hank, "'at yer'd be'n spoonin' 'round weth some darn sky pilot. What's th' matter uv yer, anyhow? Air ye goin' to show the white feather?" queried the outlaw, suspicion taking further hold on him as he dwelt on these signs in his companion of weakening in their criminal faith. "Dang my buttons! Hen, ef I thought yo' wuz, I'd pepper and salt ye, myself, I would," and the outlaw's hand, as he spoke, sought the sinister locality of his hip pocket.

"Well, I ain't a-goin' to show no white feather, an' ye know that," slowly rejoined the other. "Ye know it better than anyone," he continued, lifting his eyes and giving the man on the fence a long and piercing look. "There ain't any more loyal man an' me, Black Hank, an' ye know it. Ye oughtn't to talk to me the way ye done. 'Tain't right," and Hen, with real sorrow and grief in his tone and manner, withdrew his hand from his trousers pocket and waved it in general expostulation at the landscape. "Think uv it," cried the injured man addressing a neighboring meadow. Me! what? hell, I wouldn't 'a' said it of you," turning

back to Hank, who sat gazing intently and apparently remorsefully at the object of his recent suspicion.

“Durn it, I’m sorry—yes, I am—’at I said it, Hen. But what the mischief’s the matter with you? I never seen you this a-way before?”

“Don’t know,” returned Hen; “wisht I did. Bottom’s go’n’ to drop out, reckon. No use askin’, Hank—I couldn’t tell ye, myself. They’ll get us, though,” rejoined the man, apparently operated on by some powerful presentiment of coming misfortune.

“Get us! They—who?” cried the leader, in exasperation.

“The Law,” said the other moodily, with his eyes upon the ground at his feet.

Again the chief’s eyes emitted the threatening light of suspicion.

“Lookee here, Hen, you’ve been one of the best of us. Ain’t no doubt about that,” said the outlaw chieftain with a motion of his hand to obviate the necessity of further comment of like nature; “I know that, all right, but ye must get out of this here state of collapse you’re in—it won’t do. ’Tain’t healthy.”

“I will, Hank, I will,” and the brooding man gave himself a shake; withdrew his hands from his pockets; a far away look from the distant hills, whence it had wandered, and began to whistle. He then agreeably announced himself as ready for the forcible and speedy conveying of one William White to a certain spot, there to meet the mysterious woman whose strange and eccentric conduct afforded, with wild and thrilling effect, so much speculation in that early, rural neighborhood—a locality deeply influenced by superstition and ignorance and of which so much is there told in fearsomeness and awe, while here in tenderness and respect.

“Be keerful,” cautioned Black Hank in a low tone

of voice, as his fellow outlaw started to speak; "here's the new feller we took in to try, yisterday."

Except for an air of engaging independence which sat with an easy grace upon him and became him very well, the man who now put in an appearance was to all seeming but an ordinary tramp. He had approached silently and, while the discouraged miscreant was occupied with his own forebodings, had appeared in their midst.

"Pardner," said the outlaw leader addressing the newcomer with a bland air, "I understand ye to say ye're on yer uppers—bu'sted?"

"That's about the cut uv my jib, mates," replied the late arrival as he came to a halt with a rolling motion which, together with his speech, was strongly suggestive of the seafaring profession. With an easy gesture of the hand he pushed back his hat, unconsciously displaying, at the same time, a ragged and striking scar above the eyebrows.

"I tell yo', yesterday, we mought give ye a job, ef ever ye're reliable."

"I kin try," said the tramp simply.

"Jes' meet us here this evenin'," said Black Hank. "Er wait; jes' come over there," supplemented the outlaw pointing to where, in the distance, there appeared a towering hill beginning a far rougher country than that in which they then stood. "We'll meet ye there, ez," subjoined the bandit, "the feller—th' stuff," he hastily added, correcting himself in time, "we got to carry'll be over at that p'int."

"But, Hank,—," remonstrated his fellow evildoer, when the tramp had passed on up the road.

"I know, I know," the outlaw chieftain hastened to reassure his uneasy companion. "I'll make sure of him

fu'st. We're short handed, ye know, sence Thrash Thatcher got settled fur peachin' on the gang."

And they both turned and gazed after the retreating figure that sauntered out of sight around a curve in the road, and left Hen with puckered brow, and Black Hank betrayed by the false security of crime in a section noted for the success with which crime had long flourished.

CHAPTER VIII.

“GOOD THINGS OF DAY BEGIN TO DROOP AND DROWSE,
AND NIGHT’S BLACK AGENTS TO THEIR PREY DO ROUSE.”
—*Shakespeare.*

In the State of Indiana, there is a group of caverns which, in their unexplored mystery, charm and delight the imagination. They fill the region with legend and mystical lore. There has long been a habit of ascribing the most wonderful things to this enchanting region. Wandering spirits are supposed at night to pay fleeting visits to “the glimpses of the moon” shining above the slumbering world, but to return at the first flush of dawn to the unknown regions of the world below. Boys, reveling in their swimming sports, lend to their diving holes bottomless depths which they fancy mean nothing else than occasion for youthful daring and adventure—sinking and floating above those fearsome and undelved channels which are believed to honeycomb, in mysterious, subterranean attraction and interest, the soundless realms of the undersphere. It is not a far cry, in simple credulous minds, to fairy tales, weird and fascinating stories of hobgoblins and the ravishing adventures of elves, brownies and pixie children. On moonlight nights, the little mound people are surely believed to come forth and play upon the green; and the very earth and air teem with the most refreshing and alluring possibilities of a life other than one of daily toil, hardship and strife.

The old dame seated by her fireside of a cold winter night,—when the falling snow without drops a fleecy veil whitening hill and woodland, field and river, and the icicles form to sparkle in the splendor of the morrow’s sun,—loves to huddle her grandchildren about her and croon the tales of magic that belong to an atmosphere of dreams and enchantment.

Mighty rocks in the hills here spring from the ground like titan, invincible and jagged buttresses of primal earth. Vegetation, growing in the wild and solitary recesses of the great sharp spurs, streaks the faces of the stony formations with disordered markings—green, matted, withered underbrush and yellow decay. Crowning the towering heights of these masses of earth and stone are beech, fir, oak and hickory, which wave primeval branches to eternal space. Here there is a river lost; and afar the mystic hill, where dwells in hidden silence the mysterious stream whose romance has helped people this realm with supernatural imaginings, rears itself as watchman of the land.

In one of the caves of this region, at a certain period in the history of Indiana, lurked a band of outlaws. There was connected with these malefactors a singular character by the name of Rachel Bolers. She came and went; and was believed to deal in “ha’nts and spells.” Even at a time in her sad and melancholy history, when misfortune seems to have unbalanced her mind, the accepted strangeness of her natural character—accompanied by a shrewdness which enabled her to avoid open offense to her neighbors—caused the community to leave her unrestrained of her liberty. In this wise, she wandered at will; and represented, in the superstition which, in the minds of Indian and white man alike, clothes the deranged with supernatural attributes, a haunting dread and wayward happening to the secluded and rustic local-

ity. With vengeful and unforgiving passions, she was yet capable of kindness and humanity.

It was amidst these romantic surroundings that night was creeping in—a warm summer night. An occasional vivid flash of lightning and the hoarse growl and rumble of distant thunder would break the silence and the gathering gloom. A man, at a slow pace, rode toilsomely a strong hack of a horse up a steep and broken defile in the hilly, uneven country. A light suddenly shone in the center of a rough piece of ground nearby—a peculiar softly luminous ball of light; it as suddenly disappeared. It had caught the eye of the horseman and, for a moment, a slight sensation of fear crept through him. The rider, however, kept his gaze fastened upon the rough borders of the way closer at hand as though expecting something which he had, as yet, not seen; when, as abruptly as it had before appeared, the glowing globe of light reappeared in a different place, danced eerily from side to side for a fleeting fraction of time and then, once more, vanished. It was again seen on the other side of the road, in the rocky fields and marshy land which the rider's way had opened on.

“Hump!” muttered the horseman, “one of the causes of their superstition—a will o’ the wisp.” He rode on in silence, continuing his careful and intent survey of the wayside. The horse, striking its hoof upon a stony projection in the road, stumbled. The rider reined the animal in with a sharp jerk and continued his progress with greater care.

“This is the spot,” he said, half aloud, looking up at a solitary tree posted like a sentinel upon a rocky eminence. “Lone Pine! It was here, they said, to meet them.”

“Halt! Who goes there?” came a quick challenge from the darkness at the roadside.

William White checked his horse.

“A friend,” he answered promptly and fearlessly.

“Advance, friend, and give the countersign,” said the hidden voice with the precision of military system.

The events now transpiring were at a time when the War of the Rebellion had not long been fought. The horseman had, himself, been a soldier. He gave the countersign:

“Lost River.”

“Good,” replied the unseen spokesman, evidently satisfied with this previously understood method of identification.

“Why have you sent for me?” inquired White. “There was something in your letter concerning Miss Braddock. It affects her?”

“It does; get down,” said the voice from its hiding place.

The rider, understanding this to be a direction to dismount, did so; and stood quietly by his hard breathing animal. White had fought well in the war; the result, but one arm—the right—which now rested across the saddle. A man stepped out in front of him into the bridle path—for it was little more than such—and could be seen against the confused background of the night advance a step, when suddenly came a flash of lightning, revealing close to the silent soldier a huge black beard, a pair of flashing eyes and above it all a broad, black slouch hat. There was a peal of thunder rolling threateningly out over the hills.

In an instant, without warning of any kind, the dismounted horseman felt himself seized from behind, and a cloth was thrown quickly and skilfully over his head and shoulders. He struggled violently with his captors; but, while displaying unusual strength, the disadvantage at which he had been taken and the absence of an

arm necessarily made his efforts at liberty of little avail. His weapon, owing to the sudden and unexpected nature of attack, had, likewise, been rendered useless; indeed, its possession had not occurred to him until, too late, he found himself in the clutches of his treacherous and formidable assailants.

"See, here, pardner,"—the captive could recognize, through the covering that enveloped his head, the deadened sound of the voice of the man who had halted him in the road,—“we don’t mean ye no harm, but ye mustn’t see where ye’re tuk. A friend o’ ourn ’at we’d like ter obleege, and who can’t git here on account uv her health, wants mightily to see ye.”

“To see me on account of Miss Braddock?” in muffled tones said the one addressed, further restraining himself in the hopes of securing an additional clue to his unexpected plight. “Your letter gave me to so understand.”

“Now, then, that’s jest it,” responded the other speaker comfortably, appearing to be inspired by a genuine desire to make the situation as acceptable to his captive as possible. “So, if ye’ll go ’long quiet an’ peaceable, ye’ll be brung back ez safe ez ye went.”

“Anything in the name of Miss Braddock,” rejoined the prisoner, “is enough. If you are really acting in her interest, you need have no fear of me.”

“That there wuz what I tole th’ boys, Mr. Billy White,” concluded the outlaw; “an’, now, we’ll git along.”

The party of outlaws moved off in a direction impossible for the blinded man to know, as, before starting, he had been turned around briskly with the evident intention of confusing his sense of locality. Carrying and otherwise assisting their charge with what rude consideration appeared in their power, the prisoner’s custo-

dians made as rapid progress as the rough character of the country would permit. How far his captors conducted him, William White had no means of telling. There was a period of hurrying over many obstructions, inequalities in the ground, tough unyielding branches of short undergrowth, and once they splashed through a narrow running stream. The captive, despite what care was possible, was roughly lifted, dragged or pulled past these obstacles in their path until, at length, nearly exhausted from the imperfect breathing space left in his shrouded condition, he felt the others pause. There was a delay, a rush of cold air, a descent, the covering was removed from his head, and impenetrable darkness enveloped White. At almost the same instant, a match flared and a lantern was lighted. They were in an underground passage, the ragged and broken rock, through which nature had cut it, sparkling, from nature's crystals, with a thousand jetting reflections of light.

“Where, the devil!” in a sharp tone of authority, ejaculated the outlaw leader with the lantern, “hez thet tramp, ’at j’ined the gang, gone to?”

None seemed able to explain the sudden and apparently unlooked for disappearance of the new recruit.

“I’ll bet he’s lit out and left us in the lurch. Didn’t fancy his sailor lingo, nohow. Boys,” said the chief of the outlaws, with an oath, “he’s got the secret—wuz he in here?” queried the excited speaker, breaking off and looking about him uneasily. “Lay for him,” he cried, “hunt him—find him. Damn you all!” continued the man furiously; “does anyone know anything?”

The other members of the band glanced at each other in startled alarm. They knew nothing.

White was led away; and two outlaws were hastily dispatched without the cave in search of the missing tramp.

Whoever the deserter was, he had certainly left his former brief companionship in a cloud of *uncertainty* and, after a hurried search of the nearer premises, a copious flow of profanity and some anxious speculation, the remaining outlaws were obliged to proceed to their destination in the recesses of the earth, leaving behind them, in whatever situation, their disloyal or unfortunate colleague.

They had not gone far, when the light of the lantern, glancing from walls of strange and scintillating brilliancy, glistened upon a body of dark and murky water. What its extent, or whence it came or whither went, the enforced companion of the wild and desperate characters could not tell. The somber, brooding surface, broken by the lantern's gleam, lost itself in mysterious gloom where the reflection of light ceased to illuminate its expanse; and the silent and unfamiliar visitor to this solemn solitude gazed out upon the awesome depths in an attempt to pierce the unpierceable veil of stilly darkness beyond.

"The hidden course of Lost River," muttered the outlaws' captive companion, a quick thrill of interest shooting through him.

The chief of the outcasts caught the subdued exclamation.

"Right," he said, as they continued to advance warily along the difficult and intricate way.

A silence, which, in the damp, mouldy atmosphere of the caverns, enveloped them eerily and uncannily, followed this brief interchange.

The robber chieftain glanced suddenly and furtively into the face of his companion.

"Ye're a writer, they say.—Damn ye! ef ye write about this here, we'll burn *you* and your book!" A menace and a snarl indicated no idle threat.

The writer, greatly encouraged, remained silent.

The increased agitation of light, as the robber chief from time to time waved his lantern about, caught the other portions of the cave into which the way had broadened out of the narrower passage through which they had come. The roof continued to sparkle and gleam with unnumbered and countless dancing rays, and the walls, as far as they could be seen, gave back like soundless echoes myriads of dancing, dazzling reflections.

As they went their way, skirting cautiously a narrow path which led abruptly to the left and offered a precarious and uncertain foothold between the river and the cavern's side, frequent low spoken words of direction and guidance were uttered by the outlaw leader for the benefit of his prisoner. Again, they made a turning; a lofty chamber in the rock was entered; the lantern bearer observed, “that they were there,” and the visitor saw a large and spacious apartment of nature's preparing, which, like the other portions of the caverns, presented sparkling, gleaming sides and ceiling, where the light smote upon crystal and mineral, awakening millions of shining eyes in the blind vision of the earth. Numerous lamps, with reflectors, had been suspended about the walls, but were not lighted; and upon the far side of the chamber shone a single dull ray from a smoky taper set upon a low stool. A bat flew out of a recess somewhere; circled above the heads of those gathered in the cave, and fluttered blunderingly through the light into the outer darkness, whence the new arrivals had just come.

A man advanced from the dim light at the far side of the apartment.

“She's clean off—outen her head, ag'in; can't git a thing, 'cept foolishness, outen 'er, cap'n,”—the in-

formant paused in front of his chief, and added expressively: "Crazy, cap',—crazy ez a June bug."

The robber leader conducted the bewildered White to the taper, near which, upon a pallet of straw, lay a woman whose emaciated features were lighted by other illumination than that issuing from gem or taper, stalactite or crystal. The fires of "a mind diseased" apparently burned in those hollow eyes, and the low murmurings and incoherent wanderings of a deranged creature, at first confused, by William White, with the splash of the underground stream which they had just passed, gave token that in vain might effort here be made to learn the secret which this man, now bending above the stricken one, had come to hear.

The woman appeared to rouse herself but for a moment.

"Black Hank, are you there?" she asked.

"Yes, Rachel," answered the leader of the outlaws.

But she, at once, wandered off into incoherency, again.

"Brad Simons," muttered the woman, in her vagaries uttering the name of him who, at the moment, appeared to occupy her thoughts.

"Rachel, ol' gal, here's yer man Billy White. Can't ye talk to 'im, ol' lady?" A species of rough, uncouth kindness gave to the robber chieftain's voice a touch of redeeming quality, commending the speaker to the sense of William White like nothing else could have done. Turning to White, the outlaw continued: "She's allus talkin' 'bout Brad Simons.—Mr. White," went on the speaker, in his rude vernacular, "this ain't no snide case," meaning that the condition of the woman called Rachel possessed elements which appealed, in their justice, to the sympathies of the right feeling. "No matter what we fellers is, er what she is er ain't, that 'ere crit-

tur, thar’, ’s be’n a kind uv all roun’ mother to us all, in kineness; an’ she an’ her da’ter ’s a-be’n misused, ef I knows anything uv ther matter, an’ it’s that’s onsettled ’er mind.”

“Has a doctor seen her?” asked White.

“Oh, a kind o’ one,” returned the other, in a furtive and evasive manner. “She’s sort o’ ehronic, ez they say, —one minute, seems all right; next, don’t know nothin’.”

“Why don’t you have her moved from here?”

“This ain’t our movin’ day, stranger,” drily observed one of the other occupants of the cave.

“How long has she been confined here?” then said White.

“Pardner, ye’re to ask ez few questions ez convenient,” said the leader of the silent band.

The secret and involuntary visitor, at this, glanced up from his contemplation of the form at his feet; and, so absorbed had he been, it was, for the first time, borne in upon his consciousness that a still and motionless group of captors surrounding him was disguised with one fantastie artifice or another. The outlaw leader wore a great black beard; whether false or not was unapparent to White at the time.

“Was she clear headed, when you sent for me?”

“Dunno,” replied the chief; “reckon she mought be. Nothin’, anyways, ’u’d satisfy ’er, ’thout we’d hike ye up here. She kep’ sayin’, ‘Brad Simons—’ then she’d stop, kindo’, and then she’d say, ‘Git Billy White!’ And, ag’in, ‘Brad Simons—Git Billy White!’ She’d break off, an’ then she’d say, ‘De Braddock!’ Then she’d say: ‘Git Billy White!’ A’ter that, it wuz, ‘I’ll *tell* him, I’ll *tell* him, I’ll *tell* him,’ over and over ag’in. Wa’n’t thet erbout it, Hen?”

Hen obligingly said it was.

The two outlaws here bent their eager and inquiring looks upon the form resting in the straw, and turned a like gaze upon the kidnaped object of the chief's address, as if animated by the additional and powerful reason of their own personal curiosity and cupidity.

"Rachel—Mrs. Bolers," spoke William White, soothingly, "do you know me?" He knew the woman, in common with others of that region.

Rachel Bolers moaned, muttered something that sounded like, "Brad Simons—Tell Billy White," and presently appeared to sink into an uneasy slumber.

She stirred fretfully in her restless sleep, as though beset by evil dreams. The light continued to draw sparkles of flashing and vanishing rays from the crystal-bejeweled and broken ceiling and walls of the cavern, and here and there great upright formations, extending pillar-wise from the level sanded floor to the rugged and uneven surface of the lofty, vaulted roof, threw off shafts of vari-colored scintillations in this chamber of mystery.

"Brad Simons," murmured the dreamer on her pallet. And, now, "De Braddock." And, after a bit, "Billy White."

In the world without, the moon had followed the menace of storm. The woods about were silent in the night's still and solemn hour. The distant barking of a watchdog; the solitary call of a farmer upon a lonely farm, or the hoot of an owl alone gave sign of life, or of any agency of seemingly blind fate, which might, in the course of universal things, help piece out the puzzle of a soul's travail and kind surcease.

The night wore on. The day was breaking when William White left the cave, and the first cool, fresh breath and stir of coming dawn pervaded the world, while, here and there, a bird sang its cheery, early note of promise.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BRADDOCK FARM.

A bright, sunny morning showed a cozy farmhouse nestling in a quiet country yard. The yard was filled with roses, larkspur and hollyhock. The house was a long, low, white, oldtime affair, with a quaint half story topping the one story beneath. Two dormer windows peered like kindly old fashioned eyes from the roof. A rambling covered porch ran the full length of the front. Myriads of deep crimson roses clambered in clustering profusion over the porch, loading the air with perfume. Back of the house was a large, comfortable barn.

The fields were bountiful with corn, wheat and country abundance. The harvests of the '60's of the last century were ripening.

But for the subdued noise of poultry, the sound of bees at their hives by the side of the house and the occasional twittering of swallows about the eaves of the house and barn, all sounds of life seemed drowned in the drowsy stillness of the summer hour.

Suddenly a voice blithely singing fell upon the air, while out upon the porch there stepped from the house the singer; and De Braddock, for it was Brad Simons' object of desire whose voice was heard, paused at the steps descending to the yard and ceased her modest vocal effort. She gazed at the road which ran in front of the house, and then tripped lightly down the two or three steps leading to the ground and passed to the gate connecting with the highway. Here she stopped and directed her look to the road, south. She softly sighed.

Her gaze remained pensively fixed upon the highway, so that she was not conscious of a horseman approaching from the opposite direction.

Brad Simons, delayed over night in his intention of returning and seeking a meeting with De as agreed between himself and Uncle Peter, came riding by. He stopped his horse in front of the gate where De was standing, and with an air of confident anticipation saluted her. She acknowledged his presence, but with a distant and preoccupied air, and a lack of cordiality that was noticeable. He dismounted, and drawing his bridle rein over his arm advanced and stood by her at the gate, across which he addressed her.

"De," he said, "I have been wanting very much to see you—desiring just such an opportunity to have a—to—to say something, which may mean so much to you and me—to both of us. May I speak?"

"I scarcely know what you mean, Mr. Simons," replied the girl, glancing hastily into Simons' face.

"You have, surely, long since known what I have meant," exclaimed the wooer, attempting to take the other's hand.

De Braddock drew her hand away and replied:

"No, Mr. Simons, I am unable to understand now, or any time, what you mean or have meant."

"De, it is true I am much older than you, but you know I am rich. I am sure I could make you happy. I ask you to be my wife. Could you not let me hope you will some day listen to me?"

"Why, Mr. Simons," began the girl, only to be interrupted by the suitor.

"Do not be too hasty. The day may come—yes, will come—when you shall appreciate all I offer. Your father, to whom I have spoken in regard to my feelings, is not

in any way averse. Can you not—De, will you not marry me?”

“But, Mr. Simons, I—you oblige me to speak frankly, I am sorry if it hurts you—I do not love you. I cannot marry a man I do not love.”

“Some day you may—love me,” urged Simons earnestly, coming closer.

“No—no, I cannot, now or ever,” she exclaimed.

“You love—him—White?” said Brad, his face paling and his hands unconsciously clenching.

“You have no right to ask me,” cried the girl.

Simons felt a rage, a deadly unreasoning, jealous rage, begin to mount to his brain. He knew well who was the rival whom he had to measure. However, he retained sufficient composure to realize the unwisdom of betraying passion at such a time, and by a powerful effort restrained himself.

“Your answer is ‘No’?” he managed to say with something like self possession.

“My answer is ‘No,’ ” said she.

Brad Simons looked long at the face of the woman who had refused him; and she, in turn, gazed without flinching into his veiled, evil, burning eyes. Then, bowing quietly, he turned and left her.

Had he stormed it would have been better. There was something ill in his silent withdrawal that sent a thrill of unaccountable apprehension through the object of his late address.

“De,” called a voice from the house.

The girl at the gate appeared oblivious to all about her. She had, once more, fallen into her original reverie, presenting a pretty picture. She was of medium height, and of attractive and pleasing face. Her chestnut hair lay in little tangled ringlets, waves and fluffs about her head, face and neck. Her teeth, through her

half parted lips, gleamed white and pearly. Her cheeks were round and dimpled, and her eyes dark and engaging. She wore a simple gingham frock.

The voice from the house was heard a second time, insistently.

"Yes, yes, mother," rejoined the girl, coming out of her day dreams and partly turning.

From the door whence had come the maid now came Martha Braddock.

"De, what be ye doin' out there?" asked the mother from her position on the porch.

"Oh, nothing, mother," replied De with pretty petulant indifference, turning back to her view of the wheat fields and the road.

"'Pears like it," responded the elder woman drily. "Now, see here, child," continued she, a tone of reproof struggling for mastery in her kind voice, when she was interrupted by a sudden exclamation from the other.

"I wish," impulsively cried the girl, "that that Brad Simons would stay away."

"Why, what ails the gal! Brad kin do no harm. He's powerful rich."

"Yes, but I don't want him—so there," retorted the other, her graceful figure and dimpled good natured countenance taking on an expression of determined and unyielding objection.

"Well, ye know, since ye come from school, your pa's 'lowed, one't or twic't, as how Billy White," (De, concerned that morning with William White's failure the night previous to visit her, as he had requested at the schoolhouse permission to do,—a failure due, in her ignorance, to his experience with the outlaws,—gave another suggestive and sweeping glance up and down the road in troubled silence), "'cause of his po'try writin' an' sich, was no 'count.'" The speaker, as she delivered

these remarks to the fair object of them, gradually advanced from the porch into the yard until she stood by her daughter's side.

"You haven't anything against him, have you?" queried the young girl, wistfully scrutinizing the motherly face beside her.

"Ag'in' Billy White? The Lord love ye! no. He's a queer crittur, tho', and they make 'im wuss by settin' their faces ag'in' him."

The road leading past the house, at this moment echoed with the rattle of an approaching vehicle, which proved to be a democrat—not the political article, but a medium-sized spring-wagon known by that name. The conveyance drawn by a stout roan horse came on at a good, brisk rate. Sitting upon the seat of the democrat was a man of strikingly homely features, who drove, and whistled shrilly in a tuneless effort at a popular air.

"De," said the mother with an accent of amused pleasure, and glancing hastily at the dusty highway, "I do declare there's that ree-dik-lus Bob Likkum," and De's mother hurriedly wiped her hands on the apron hanging from her comfortable girth of waist, and her fingers sought a stray wisp of gray-sprinkled hair at her temple.

"He is a funny man," said the daughter, in full sympathy with her mother's appreciation of the humorous characteristics of the person in question.

"Mos' makes me die laughin'. Don't know what I'll do, if he comes 'round much more with that funny something about—somebody," remarked Mrs. Braddock, entirely and hopelessly at a loss to remember the anecdote in point, but quite overpowered by the recollection. The worthy woman's features became convulsed with merriment.

Robert Likkum, a comedian of that neighborhood, drew on toward the house.

"Howdee, Mis' Braddock," called the driver of the democrat to the elder woman, as he stopped the roan at the gate. "Pooty as a peach, Miss De," gallantly added the rustic courtier, bestowing this last compliment upon the younger of the two women; "wisht you'd marry me," and the man smiled genially, awaiting the retort which a friendly passage at arms never failed to bring from Mrs. Braddock's popular offspring.

Instead of receiving a verbal box on the ears as the country gallant expected, Robert Likkum was taken back by the object of his address answering with ready and apparent sincerity:

"Marry you right off, but 'pon one condition."

As Likkum had his own particular reasons for not seriously meaning matrimony, and not being without vanity, he experienced that form of alarm which warns the male breast of the possible unexpected surrender of the female forces. Robert, in this not unusual state of self deception, gazed helplessly at the instrument of his discomfiture.

"Wha—what condition?" stammered he, without getting down from the democrat, his unusually homely albeit honest face wearing a look of ludicrous confusion.

"That you get yourself made over," and the girl, letting fly this primitive shaft, emitted a peal of silvery laughter that Bob's best story could not by any possibility have improved.

Poor Likkum turned red, but climbed out of the democrat and hitched the roan. By the time he was at the house, however, he was smiling bravely.

"How's Mist' Braddock?" inquired Bob, addressing Mrs. Braddock and trying to appear unconscious, while he found it impossible to restrain his eyes from wander-

ing, at disturbed intervals, apprehensively in his late adversary's direction.

"Come in—come in; don't mind that gal. Peter's well. He's out with the hands," and saying this, Mrs. Braddock, with intonations of hearty welcome in her voice, moved bustlingly into the house followed by her caller; while De, brimming with mischief, hung, figuratively speaking, at all points threateningly on the Likkum's harrassed flank, and quite overawed and disconcerted the Likkum understanding.

"Now, ye behave yerself," remonstrated Mrs. Braddock in a hoarse whisper to her daughter. "I say, don't mind her"—this again to Bob, who sat fanning himself with his hat, having taken a seat on the extreme edge of one of Mrs. Braddock's stiff back parlor chairs. The fun-loving De, regarding Likkum's rout as both disastrous and complete, concluded to exercise mercy and considerately left the room to presently, with gracious smiles, return and hand the welcome guest a dish of enticing early apples.

"Now, I reckon, Miss De, you do beat the Jews," observed Likkum, his peace of mind agreeably restored. He gazed with strong, manly admiration at the fresh young face of his late tormentor. "D'yo' know who I seen jes' now when I wuz comin' up the road?" added he. "'Twuzn't Brad—Brad Simons. I know ye don't like thet 'ere Brad. Don't blame ye. 'Twuzn't him. 'Twuz the other."

"The other" was William White, who, liberated according to the terms of agreement which the cavern outlaws had made the night before, energetically rose on this morning to realize that some boding and, as yet, unexplained mystery, or the empty fancy of an eccentric and harmless mad woman, had risen with him to pursue and threaten the future of De Braddock, if not of him-

self. His attempted though enforced interview with Rachel Bolers had been productive of no light on the meaning of her remarks, rational or otherwise, which had led the freebooters to bring him into her presence. There had been times when, in the soldier-writer's observation of the creature about the country, he had half suspected Rachel Bolers, in her erratic movements, of mere cunning assumption of the character of a lunatic. He had before observed that she cherished some deep and bitter animosity to Brad Simons; and he had long ago been unable to determine whether or not she employed her wayward manner to cloak her deeper designs. He had not expected to find her in this association with outlaws, although he was not surprised at anything connected with the woman. His chief cause of wonderment was, that the thieves and malefactors should so daringly, even though previously blindfolding him, introduce himself into their secret hiding place which, by reason of guarded and cunning concealment on the part of the outcasts, had been but a matter of fearsome speculation among the country people for years. He judged that, grown bold to the point of contempt for and indifference to a community which the desperadoes had so long held in subjection, the outlaws had deemed it a safe venture, with ordinary precautions, to gratify or endeavor to gratify one to whom they appeared, as in the case of Rachel Bolers, to acknowledge a species of indebtedness; or that they took the risk to gain, through her disclosures, information of value to themselves in their own other lawless operations.

That William White loved De Braddock there could be no manner of doubt. It had been only the discouraging view which, in those times, practical thought and in a rural locality appeared to hold for the profession of letters, that had thus far held him back from commit-

ting an interest as sacred as his regard for De to any questioning, until success in his chosen vocation should crown his efforts. If mistaken in such a course, he had, nevertheless, been equally sincere.

A blush on the fair brow of his companion told Likkum that he had secured a speedy revenge in his reference to "the other."

"Well, there," continued Bob, generously abstaining from pursuing his advantage, "ain't goin' to pester ye; seen Billy—Billy White. He's a writer, and got yaller hair, hain't he?" and Likkum, impelled by some subtle association of "yaller hair" with literature, paused. "Ain't no harm in him nuther, calk'late?" pursued Bob. He glanced as in a kind of casual inquiry into the face now a trifle nearer his own, for the girl, inspired by some deeper interest than she had heretofore manifested, had moved a step closer to the visitor. "No," said the speaker, as he examined the innocent young countenance, "see there hain't; couldn't no harm come out o' nuthin' 'round where you wuz," and the rural moralist lapsed into silence, apples and sage meditation. "Looked kindo' pale, Billy did," said Bob presently, looking up.

Could it be, thought De, that her lover's failure to come to her on the evening before, as he had, in her sense of maidenly and ecstatic recollection, craved permission to do, was owing to illness? Her keen disappointment had something of its sharper edge taken off by the supposition, although her concern became increased. She could, of course, have little idea of the stress and danger through which the object of her love and affection had passed at the hands of the outlaws on her account, or, with the singular inconsistency of womankind, and indeed human nature in general, her approval and admiration would have eagerly taken the place of her solie-

itude, and, so to speak, fallen down and worshiped her heroic idol.

"Is he sick, Robert?" quickly asked De.

"Reckon none to hurt," replied Bob consolingly.

"Where'd you see him?" said De.

"He'pin' Widder Wa'msey fix her chicken coop," replied Bob.

"He boards with her," said the maid, appearing to consider this the safer explanation for Mr. White's presence at the Widow Walmsey's dwelling place.

"Yep," assented Bob.

The girl drew a little sigh of seeming relief.

"She's too old," said she, as if actuated by a cunning second thought.

"Heart's never old," said the man.

"De," interrupted Mrs. Braddock, who had withdrawn to the kitchen and at this instant appeared at the parlor door, "them pies need 'tendin'," and the daughter flew with rather more than her accustomed alacrity to do her mother's bidding.

"Seems kind o' pleased with Billy," observed Likum, indicating De's vanishing form and addressing himself to Mrs. Braddock.

Mother Braddock seated herself for a little spell of rest, and to entertain her visitor as well as her best powers would permit. She rocked comfortably in the rocking chair, and finally remarked in response to Robert's words, while a bumble-bee buzzed by the open door:

"Yes, De be right smart set on Billy, and he on her," Mrs. Braddock drew a sigh. "Don't know 'bout marryin' sometime, anyway," dubiously, if a little unfaithfully, pursued the good lady in a general way. "Things turns out so orful bad sometimes. There's John's weddin'—marriage, ye know, weth that mizable Nance—Nance Bolers."

"Maw," called De from the kitchen.

Mrs. Braddock hastily went to see what her daughter wanted, strieter country manners being swept away by domestic necessity.

"That there feller's a sing'lar kind of a cuss," went on Bob gravely to himself, upon Mrs. Braddock's temporary withdrawal from the room, and continuing an analysis of the Character of William White, who had been furnishing the absorbing topic of conversation between himself, De's mother and De herself; "an' I never know jes' whether them po'try writin' chaps 'mounts to nothin', nohow." The puzzled man wrinkled up his brows and took a huge bite from an apple in his hand. "Guess, if any gal wants to jes' marry a 'roses-red,-violets-blue,-sugar's-sweet-and-so-are-you' poet-and-writer-chap, she kin, though," and, with this extraordinary description of a literary character as embodied in William White, Bob Likkum finished eating the apple in his hand; then, repeating to himself gravely for a humorist and with an accent of gentleness, "a 'roses-red,-violets-blue,-sugar's-sweet-and-so-are-you' poet-and-writer-chap," he left the house and went out into the doorway to see if the roan, feloniously attacked by horseflies, was going to kick the democrat to pieces.

Robert Likkum had seen the better part of thirty-six years of life. He was of a tall, thin, angular build and, as is often seen in those possessing a vein of humor, was endowed with an austere visage which would have put to blush a spiritual ruler of the days of the New England Blue Laws. His hair was coarse and red; his skin sandy; his cheek bones high; his ears large; his eyes small and ferrety, and his heart was as true as steel.

As Mr. Likkum's general looks of solemnity heightened his humorous traits of personal character so his dress was severe in its simplicity, consisting of a well

worn suit of funereal black made in the style of the day, with high coat collar, tight sleeves and full trousers drawn close about the ankles around which, at this moment, the big family Newfoundland dog was sniffing in friendly fashion. A peculiarity of Bob's was, on holidays and at times of unusual and extreme festivity, to change this mortal aspect to one of gay not to say gaudy attire.

"By gosh!" exclaimed Bob, suddenly slapping his breast pocket, as Mrs. Braddock and De could be seen through the kitchen door which, after repelling the horseflies and visiting the barn, he had just reached; "I do declare afore gracious, but I got a letter fur you, Mis' Braddock; an' Miss De," said he, looking slyly over where the figure of the attractive girl appeared midst flour and pastry, "'s so sweet I furgot the hull business."

Likkum hastily thrust his hand into his coat pocket and extracted a letter. He walked quickly into the kitchen and handed Mrs. Braddock the forgotten missive which, in the spirit of accommodation existing in the country, he had brought from the neighboring post office.

CHAPTER X.

JOHN.

"From John," briefly observed Mrs. Braddock, taking the letter from Bob's outstretched hand and scanning the address.

"Oh!" exclaimed De interestedly, for she loved her brother from whom the letter had been received.

"Yes," said Mrs. Braddock, and continuing to view the lately received envelope; "them's the way John allus 'u'd make his letters, jes' when he wuz a leetle feller," and she got a pair of spectacles from a shelf at hand, cleaned them carefully upon her apron, placed them upon her nose and addressed herself to the perusal of the communication from her absent son.

She read attentively through the letter and silently laid it on the table. She took off her glasses without speaking, replaced them on the shelf, scratched her nose—a way she had when vexed—and returned to her pastry. She worked for several seconds without speaking. Bob Likkum, in silence, remained near the door. De waited nearby.

"That thar' critter 'll be the death of the pore feller, reckon," at last observed Mrs. Braddock, going steadily on with the employment in hand.

"Oh, dear!" cried De in dismay.

"Yes, 'low it'll be her ur him—one er t'other 'll have to get off'n the everlastin' earth—'tain't big enough for both; no, sir! Well, the Lord's ways is curious ways, an' we're all on us pore sinners," and the troubled woman quietly wiped a tear from her eye. She pressed

the soft dough into the tin scallops ornamenting the rim of a piepan, and filled the pastry lined receptacle with finely chopped apples plentifully dusted with sugar and nutmeg. Covering the appetizing mixture with material for an upper crust, she carried the delicacy to the stove and placed it with similar preparations in the hot oven.

Her companions had preserved during the foregoing operations a discreet, if rather lengthened, silence. Bob Likkum, looking on near the door, at length cleared his throat and made effort, in the sincerity of his nature, to supply relief and assurances of good will. All in that neighborhood knew the singular story of young John Braddock's marriage.

"Ye see, Mis' Braddock," began the sympathetic Bob, clearing his throat a second time, "I don't know nothin' 'bout this 'ere thing of John's present er, ez ye might say, new trouble, tho' 't must be right smart to set ye so sharp. Is it Nance 'at's the trouble, er that 'ere brother uv Nance?"

Mrs. Braddock was either insensible to the sound of Bob's voice or, which was more likely, was unwilling to admit that it was not John's wife Nance, whom Martha Braddock's speech had arraigned, but the wife's brother who was at fault; and so the mother of John Braddock was silent.

"Ef, Mrs. Braddock," continued Bob, who would have helped a friend with money, time or service in any way in his power,—“ef they's anything I kin——”

Mrs. Braddock interrupted him.

"Nothin'—nothin', 't all, ye kin do, Robert," said the good woman, without turning from her work—"nothin', 't all. The Lord's will be done!"

"Amen! Mother Braddock," said a new and reverential voice from the rear of Bob Likkum, "and may you and all who sorrow be comforted." The speaker ceased

and, walking past Likkum, entered with country informality the tidy kitchen of the farmer's family. "Couldn't make you hear, in front," added the caller explanatorily, "so I stole a march, in the rear."

"Brother Woods, right glad to see you," said De's mother, as the latter turned and greeted the newcomer. "De, ye must git the parson a cheer. There, there; sit down," and Mrs. Braddock hospitably forced her guest into a seat.

"I trust," said Parson Woods, as he settled himself in the chair which De at her mother's bidding had provided, and gave a quick glance, in remembrance of the tone of previous conversation overheard by him, at the open letter still lying on the kitchen table, "that you have received no bad tidings of any sort, Mrs. Braddock?" The visitor's tones were kind and those of a good and well meaning minister. Parson Woods, highly esteemed, was of long-time residence amongst his flock of the neighborhood Methodist parish.

Martha Braddock's conscience may have been quickened by the visit of her spiritual adviser; for she appeared, in her reply which at once followed Parson Woods' inquiry, to be concerned with a recollection of possible injustice done by her to her son's wife.

"Well, well, parson," said she, with otherwise apparent irrelevance, "mebbe I wuz a mite hard on the gal—mebbe I wuz. 'Tain't reely the gal's fault, this time, a'ter all."

"What is not the girl's fault—of whom are you speaking?" mildly and gravely inquired the pastor.

"John's wife, parson," replied Mother Braddock.

"I am sincerely glad to hear she is not at fault," rejoined the preacher. "I have been told she is making John a most excellent and faithful wife," added he earnestly. "You know salvation 's free,"—the worthy and

conscientious minister lost no opportunity of registering the beneficent precepts of Methodism.

"Ye're right—ye're right, parson," said Martha Braddock generously, and De looked pleased,—“ye're right, an' so's Bob. 'Tain't the gal—tain't her—'tain't Nance. It's jes' ez Bob sez—it's thet scamp—thet reskel Tom—Tom Bolers, Nance's brother. On'y,” went on the perplexed and distressed woman, “ef John hadn't 'a' married Nance, 'twouldn't hev' brought that scawag-villain Tom Bolers to worrit and fret the life out'n John. But,” exclaimed Mother Braddock, finding a welcome refuge in a change of topic,—“but that there eclipse uv the sun, which is to-day, ought about to be aroun’,” and Mrs. Braddock walked to the kitchen door and interestedly peered forth at the blinding god of day, which certainly as yet gave no evidence of hiding his flaming face. “But, there now, parson,” further ejaculated the farmer's wife, breaking off suddenly, “my gracious! how kin ye stand this heat; this kitchen is jes' like a bake oven. De, child, take the parson into the parlor.” Then, turning to Likkum: “And, Robert, you and him sit in front.”

John, son of Peter and Martha Braddock, was twenty-seven years of age. He was residing and in business at a town some distance from Peter's farm. Seven years before this, while still living at home with the old folks, he had first met Nance Bolers, who afterwards became John Braddock's wife. The young woman, from the day of wrong and desertion at the hands of her unknown betrayer to the time when she had secured the love and confidence of young Braddock, had, in the unhappy attitude in which society places the erring and the fallen, been, justly or otherwise, the subject of remark for that locality.

It may, at any time, be a matter of grave question

how to properly dispose conventionality as to the justice due those placed under its purely artificial bans. It is an absurdity to visit nature's trying participations with bloodcurdling and appalling censure; and many a male or female young, had he or she not been terrorized by habitual parental condemnation into withholding confidence at a particular time of life, would have escaped destruction resulting from deceit, evasion and flight.

Young Braddock was a man of integrity. He was singularly pure minded. He had his own conception of right and a corresponding tenacity in adhering to that conception, which to a less charitably minded person might have appeared lacking in worldly wisdom.

John's letter spoke of trouble. Truth claims the statement that it was not trouble of Nance's bringing about. Nance had an infinitely no-account brother, whose unholy, unlimited and regrettable capacity for mischief was eventually to contribute materially to John Braddock's calamitous undoing; and, in the tangled windings of destiny, help ravel the phantoms from the meshes of our fleeting lives!

CHAPTER XI.

WHERE THIEVES FELL OUT AND TOM BOLERS CAME IN.

Hen, the outlaw, walked on ahead of his chieftain, while the latter worthy despoiled humankind.

"Get the money," Black Hank spoke and toyed with the fringes of his great black beard, whose somber hue put a lonely crow, at that moment flying high over the heads of the outlaw leader and his quarry, apparently to the blush and sent it cawing protestingly to the hills. A buzzard wheeling above a neighboring wood, past which Hank and his contemplated victim were slowly walking, circled nearer; seemingly to share in the prey which, in the threat and gloom of coming storm and approaching night, the outlaws were luring to his fate.

Tom Bolers, a young reprobate of not a very high order of intelligence at best and forming the lawless outcast's present dupe, broke into the speech of his own type.

"How 'mI goin' to know yo'll do the square thing by me, huh?" he queried.

Hank kicked a stone out of his way—Bolers looked at the buzzard; they continued their slow, self occupied walk.

"If you don't git th' money an' give it to us, after what I've told you about our secrets, we'll put ye out o' business, anyway," threatened the outlaw leader significantly. "I tell ye it'll cost that much to j'ine us an' become a reg'lar member—and bein' told all about the gang," continued the ruffian evilly, and with an apparent understanding of a weakness of character making

the other easy of management, "an' havin' said yo'd j'ine, ef ye don't do it we'll leg ye, now, anyhow," which evidently meant something of so direful a description to Tom's apprehension that he preferred, under any conditions, to avoid it, for he hastened to assure the chief of desperadoes that he would discharge all pledges he had made, or willingly abide the consequences.

"Willin' ur not," retorted Hank gruffly, "ye'll git 'em."

"Ain't got no money, meself," went on Bolers, thus agreeably and forcibly admonished. "Don't know how'll git any," and he gazed vaguely upon the unmoved countenance of the robber.

"'Tain't my business; you git it," was the implacable reception the other met with from Black Hank. "Wouldn't keer nothin' 'bout it," Tom's baleful companion continued, "ef ye hadn't 'a' led us to suppose ye'd j'ine us. Ye'll j'ine us now," rethreatened Hank, "er ye'll git lost some night an' never git found, no more. Understand that, do ye?" The speaker paused loweringly, and waved his hand with a menacing gesture before Tom Boler's face, planting himself screeningly in front of Tom as a farmer went by in a wagon and turned to gaze curiously at the men in the roadway.

Bolers stared moodily and heavily at the ground, his eyes dropping their look before the hypnotism of the other man's fierce and determined manner.

"Ye've a little property, hain't ye?" inquired Tom's taskmaster, walking a little way to where his henchman, the trusty Hen,—who had tactfully allowed his chief to be alone with their prey,—stood ruminating by himself. "Hain't he a little property, Hen, eh?"

"Shore—sart'in," said the other outlaw, working up a manner of genial assent.

"It's in court—'tain't settled—they're lawin'—"

'twon't do no good," replied John Braddock's brother in law.

"Well," retorted the leader of the outlaws, continuing to play upon the fears of his victim, "you know too much for to be let off now. Can't you get it, some way, out of Simons; you got a good chance on his cattle," cunningly insinuated the man,—“you work his cattle driving for him, sometimes, don't you? I've no cause, myself, to love Simons, any more than anybody else has—he's a scoundrel. God knows!” said the speaker apparently giving but scant attention to the presumed unimportance of his present companion, and losing for an instant an attribute of disguise in voice and manner; “he has done for me, together with what I owe them at Washington.” The man stopped suddenly, when a peal of thunder and a flash of lightning gave token of the coming tempest. The robber stood unmoved. The coarse, country dialect, evidently assumed for a purpose of concealment of his real identity, had entirely disappeared. He looked quickly and suspiciously at Bolers. Seemingly satisfied that the duller intellect of the subject of his designs had apprehended nothing unusual from the conclusion of his speech, he remained silent. He had apparently quite forgotten, for the moment, the presence of his second criminal associate. The latter looked quickly at the outlaw leader, but said nothing.

“Couldn't git nary out o' Simons, lest I forged him,” returned Nance's brother.

“Lest ye what?” asked Black Hank.

“Forged—forged his name,” replied Tom.

“Kin ye forge?” queried Hank, while his tones rang true, once more, with the accents of the soil.

“I done some uv it,” rejoined Bolers sheepishly.

"Do it ag'in," said the robber. "Ain't thet so, Hen, —do it ag'in?"

"Shore—sart'in," said Hen.

"I dunno—it's putty risky," objected Tom. "Never done much at it, 'cept ter practice."

"Simons uz got more'n he ought to have, anyway," insisted the tempter; "ain't he, Hen?"

"Shore," said Hen.

"Yes, he's mighty rich," was the prospective accomplice's hesitating rejoinder.

"You're a fool if you don't tap him, that's all," growled Hank. "You're most as bad as any of us; you might as well go the hull hog er none. Eh, Hen?"

"Sart'in," said Hen.

"Will you let me in on everything, if I do?" queried the timid and hesitating neophyte.

"Shore an' sart'in," replied the chief and lieutenant in unison.

The storm that had been muttering so long, here at last broke, descending upon the devoted trio in a hurricane of wind, floods of furious rain, dazzling and terrifying lightning and deafening crash of bellowing thunder. Together with this, night was upon them.

"The hut's off the road, there," shouted Hen, and the three men broke into a run.

With difficulty, after leaving the road, they made their way through a piece of wood, until panting and drenched they found themselves at a small, rude cabin in a little clearing in the midst of forest trees. The outlaws were evidently familiar enough with the locality and the crude shelter they sought, and unhesitatingly the chief of the miscreants pushed open the door of the hut and entered. He was quickly followed by the others.

Here, at least, was protection from the raging elements without; and no time was lost in adapting their

needs to the circumstances of the place. A light was struck, and an old oil lamp was soon smoking its murky illumination on a battered table in the center of the one small room of which the cabin consisted. The place, constructed in the most primitive style of rough, unhewn logs, had evidently, as a law abiding abode, long been uninhabited; and, doubtless, was now being used exclusively by the outlaws as a rendezvous for their nefarious doings.

"There," growled the outlaw leader, like a huge dog shaking the rain from his drenched and saturated clothing. He took his hat from his head and threw the water off it. "Sit down, you fellers," he said.

The others shook the rain from themselves.

A dilapidated chair and a rough bench were dragged to the table.

"Now," directed Black Hank, as the storm beat outside, "you git that 'air paper ready that'll fetch the money on Simons' name," and the outlaw motioned Tom Bolers to the table. "Here's some blank checks, and here's his name on a letter I found." The freebooter coolly took a letter from his own pocket, indifferently tore away the signature at the end and handed the fatal name to the intended forger.

Already having the appearance of being singularly prepared for an event which manifestly had been wholly unforeseen by the lawless leader, Black Hank sought for and obtained from a hidden recess in the cabin a supply of ink and a pen. These articles he placed upon the table, at which the three seated themselves; and, by the light of the flaring lamp, while the thunder rent and tore and the dizzy, jagged lightning shot and fired the air of the forest and the night without, the two outlaws sat and grimly watched Tom Bolers laboriously but successfully commit a forgery of Brad Simons' signature.

As the sinister and baleful act was accomplished, the hearing of the darkling and stealthy operators was suddenly shattered and paralyzed by a deafening, ear splitting crash and roar, and through the narrow glass window of the hut came a blinding flash of lightning. The little group of criminals sprang involuntarily to the door. Black Hank impulsively threw it open. Before the entrance there lay, broken, twisted, riven—as if thrown down by the hand of some giant of the tempest—a mighty oak—a monarch laid low, in his native wilds—and covering, with bewildering and direful confusion, half of the little clearing in which the startled, scheming and unworthy triumvirate stood.

And the imps and spirit of the storm and tempest, abroad in the thick, dense growth and night's black darkness of the forest wilderness, leaped and rioted and romped above and around the havoc they had wrought.

It was, perhaps, Tom Bolers' first real criminal offense—certainly he had never as yet been detected in flagrant crime; and the unsuspecting banker to whom, in due course, the forged check was presented, knowing of Tom's general connection with Simons in the latter's cattle interest, paid the money readily enough. Although Brad learned at once of the unpleasant liberty taken with his bank account, for some reason he kept the affair quiet until speedily brought alone to the attention of John Braddock by the cattleman himself. John instantly offered, for the sake of his wife, Tom's sister, to make good Brad's loss, if Brad in his turn would drop the criminal prosecution of John's brother in law. Now, it was right here that Simons first began secretly and craftily to develop a formidable and treacherous design upon the peace and welfare of De Braddock and De Braddock's brother. Cordially pretending to receive

John Braddock's amicable proposals in good faith, he set to work to accomplish that which he had in view.

Tom Bolers' low order of intelligence and almost total lack of general moral perception had caused him to realize little if anything of the necessity of flight or escape; and, while Simons for his own purposes left him at large, Tom was still to bear the measure of his own responsibility and offense.

There was a meeting between John Braddock and Tom Bolers of a stormy and protracted nature.

"For your sister's sake, Tom,—for your sister's sake," John eventually said, "I cannot see you go to the penitentiary. I am not a man of large means, as you know. Simons, however, will have to be paid."

Tom Bolers looked at his brother in law with a hang-dog expression. "There's that property uv mine in court," rejoined Nance's brother. "'Tain't settled yit, and 'tain't much, but 's 'nuff——"

"I've thought of that," quickly interrupted the other; "and I will give my note to Brad; and you can pay, if you win your case."

Nance's husband returned to Brad Simons; and, with a sense of the delicacy and concern which always inspired the country merchant when he thought of the interests and welfare of Nance, opened negotiations with the defrauded though wily cattle dealer.

"Brad," said he, handing the former a duly executed note for the amount of Tom's forgery, "I want this matter to stop right here. You understand, of course?" Braddock's manner was determined and uncompromising. To him, there could be but one settlement. For a moment, he was able to hold Simons closely fixed with his eyes.

Brad then shifted his own look from the other man's direct, strong gaze.

"Certainly, certainly," responded Simons shiftily.

"You understand," persisted Braddock; "there will be no prosecution."

"Oh, of course not," returned the other.

"There must be none, on account of my wife," added Tom Bolers' earnest and determined brother in law decisively.

Brad Simons appeared to reflect for a moment, and then allowed his gaze, withdrawn for an instant, to return, with a look of curious scrutiny, to Braddock's set, immovable countenance.

"Oh, yes; on account of your wife. To be sure," the unscrupulous cattleman replied, but with an appearance of preoccupation and insincerity which could hardly impress his companion reassuringly.

"It's understood, is it?" urged John Braddock.

"Perfectly," replied Brad Simons.

And it was—by Brad; while, hardly satisfied, John went away.

CHAPTER XII.

A SEASONABLE CONSPIRACY.

It happened later that a party of four or five drovers, including Tom Bolers and loafing in Brad Simons' stable lot, could see approaching on the neighboring road the figure of a man riding a powerful bay horse.

One of the idlers, with an evil cast in his eye and other marks about his general appearance that would have turned a law abiding citizen away from his vicinity on a dark night, broke a silence prevailing among the unsavory crew with the remark:

"Bolers, there's yer man a-comin' up ther road, now."

This announcement occasioned Tom Bolers seated upon a log to lift his gaze from the ground, where he had previously fixed it in gloomy silence.

"Any uv your darn biz'ness, ef 'e is?" growled Bolers ill conditionally.

"Ye all fired brute, ye," retorted the first speaker with just resentment, "w'en I do ye a favor, ag'in, ye'll mos' likely know it. Ye ought ter be ducked in the hoss trough, there,—that's w'at ye ought; an' fer half a cent I'd do it fer ye," and Tom's censor eyed, with the appearance of ominous intention, the stable-yard trough at the pump, filled with water for the stock.

The rider, a preliminary view of whom had awakened this interesting passage, now reached the barnyard where the drovers were collected. One of them slouched up and opened the gate.

"Hello, Tom," genially called the horseman as he entered the stable yard, and catching sight of Tom Bolers

sulking on the log. Brad affected to smile cordially from horseback, and evidently meant to be agreeable.

"Well, you sent fur me, an' I'm here," responded John Braddock's brother in law, sulkily rising to his feet.

"Here, Bill, put this horse up," ordered Brad of one of his drovers, at the same time dismounting and tossing his horse's bridle into the man's outstretched hand. "Tom," continued the cattle raiser pleasantly, turning to Bolers, "come into the house with me."

Bradford or, as he was commonly called, Brad Simons was a trifle past forty years of age. His face of florid complexion was round and smooth and but for something in the bright, glancing eyes that told of a false heart it might have been a face entitled to a certificate of unqualified good nature. His hair was brown; his figure heavy though not fleshy, giving an impression of shapeliess owing to good physical proportions. He weighed fully two hundred pounds. He was six feet in height. His dress was a suit of snuff color which had come, in an habitual style of attire affected by the cattleman, to familiarly distinguish Brad Simons' appearance throughout that region.

Tom Bolers' age was twenty-four. He was of commonplace appearance, but for the dark, curling hair and not ill looking face. Any impression that he might have made upon a beholder, however, was lost in an indefinable weakness that seemed to envelope him as in a mist.

When Brad Simons, with Tom, entered the house, he proceeded directly to the former's private room. Tom Bolers' conductor, as the two entered the apartment, closed the door and nodded easily to a chair, at the same time requesting his companion to be seated. The room to which the grazier had brought his visitor was, for the use of one whose time was chiefly occupied in raising cat-

tle, unusually well stocked with books. When Tom Bolers had seated himself, Simons himself took a chair and at once broached his object in bringing this meeting about.

"Tom," began Brad assuming a tone of real or affected kindness, "you know how your brother in law John Braddock has befriended you. This hardly needs comment; but I will say, nevertheless," went on the speaker weighing his words carefully and speaking with a peculiar emphasis, "that he has shown a deep and worthy interest in you as the brother of his wife and, from my knowledge of him, would go to much greater lengths for your sister's sake to save you from the consequences of this crime. I have not been able, Tom, as yet to finally see my way," pursued Brad Simons with an edifying appearance of public virtue, "as a citizen to abandon prosecution of your error; but," added the man quickly, perceiving the cloud of genuine apprehension and terror deepening on Tom's face, "I could, in all probability, let you off—upon certain conditions." Here the stockman paused and watched his victim who, with his hands clasped and his elbows resting upon his knees, sat gazing intently at the floor.

Without raising his eyes Tom Bolers asked, in a mechanical way colored by the general air of hopelessness which seemed natural with him:

"What is it ye want uv me? Say it and don't play with a feller, like a cat with a mouse."

Simons laughed lightly, and said:

"Why, you see, Tom, I don't mind telling *you*:—I'm a little sweet on your brother in law's sister De, and would like to marry and get out of this plagued, lonely bachelor life," and he spoke with a touch of something like real feeling. "I am informed, however," the man went on, "that there is another—person," he uttered the word "person" as though this portion of his com-

munication was the most distasteful part of his task,—“a writer—a one armed soldier, I believe; well, he has some headway with Miss Braddock and,” wound up Brad speciously, “I’ll have to have a little help.”

“Go on,” said Tom without changing his position, his elbows on his knees and his eyes fixed in moody contemplation upon his inquisitor’s heavy riding boots planted, upon their owner’s feet, implacably on the floor before Tom Bolers’ restless and harried eyes.

“As I have said,” continued the faithless dealer in cattle, “I am aware of the high place your own sister Nancee holds, as his wife, in your brother in law’s affections, and that it would hurt her for you to come to harm of any kind that might be avoided. Now, Tom, make John understand that I can be depended on to call off the prosecution, if he will help me to his sister, and you and I can call quits.”

The cattleman’s alluring and fragrant roses were plentifully studded and bedecked with thorns of a peculiar and piercing sharpness. Brad Simons, in this adroit and cunning speech, well knew the torture it would be to Nancee Braddock, a naturally high minded girl, to have her own name and that of her husband John Braddock dragged before the public and the wretched past, as by association, revived by her brother’s prosecution for forgery; and he, also, knew John Braddock’s unwillingness to permit her to suffer so.

Tom Bolers, when Brad Simons concluded, replied, still without lifting his eyes, though addressing his employer with a show of respect:

“You know ’s well ’s I do, Mr. Simons, ’at I don’t care ’f ye marry De Braddock er the Queen uv England, but yer goin’ ter have trouble ’bout doin’ it,” Tom’s remark being obscured with some doubt whether the difficulty referred to regarded a matrimonial design upon the

heroine of our story or the then ruler of the right and tight little British Isle; but Brad understood and, here, mercilessly though smilingly rejoined:

"You wouldn't like to go to the penitentiary, Tom, would you? Look here, now,—come! You see what you can do with John Braddock. You'll either make him understand that his wife's brother will take a trip up the road," pursued Tom's inexorable taskmaster significantly, "or I must have his sister," and it would have been attended with some trouble to determine which would have been the least acceptable to John.

The alternative in all this harangue of Brad Simons was but too plain to the overburdened and oppressed mind of the unhappy forger, who viewed with but little consolation the results which he knew would come of an appeal to John Braddock's influence with John's sister De in favor of the cattle dealer. Tom groaned in spirit.

"Them's hard conditions, Mr. Simons," he said presently, shifting in his chair.

"Take them, or leave them," retorted the merciless and relentless cattleman, preserving an air of politeness which he had, up to this time, adopted with some show of cordiality towards his unfortunate victim, but now permitting a note of ominous intimidation to creep into his cold, searching voice.

"I'll do, sir, the best I can to help ye," muttered Nance Bolers' distressed and unhappy brother hopelessly.

"That," rejoined Simons immovably, "is about all any of us can do," and, in the cheerful shadow of the walls of the state's comfortable and alluring home for playful and sportive breakers of the law, the wretched and ensnared kinsman of John Braddock's wife crept sullenly out of the tricky and dishonorable cattle merchant's harsh and repellent presence.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN AGGRAVATED AND DEADLY THREAT.

A man, at the close of day, was footing it briskly along the sidewalk of a thriving Indiana town. From the direction opposite to that which he was pursuing, there hurried a child. The late cloudy summer afternoon was beginning to blend into the first shadows of the evening, and the thick shade of the foliage of trees lining the walk cast the two figures into something like indistinctness. As they neared each other it was evident that the child, a little girl, was influenced by some strong and intense excitement. As she caught sight of the man, she sped on until her rapid gait became a run, and panting she reached the object of her haste.

"Oh! papa," gasped the child.

The person so addressed had halted in consternation upon recognizing the disordered little figure.

"Nanny!" he exclaimed.

"Hurry, hurry," was all the little one could say.

"What is the matter? Tell me," said her father.

"Mama—" panted the child.

"Nanny, do you hear me! what is the matter?"

"Mama—a man!—she sent me to find you."

"Come," said the elder, seeing he could get no connected utterance, and hurrying on to his home not far distant.

As John Braddock—we are following De's brother—neared his dwelling, he perceived his wife standing in the doorway. Facing her in the path leading from the

gate to the door, there loafed a fellow of rough, ill favored appearance. As the hurrying man approached, the woman cried:

"John, this man has insulted me."

Braddock hastily threw open the gate and stepped into the yard. He advanced, threateningly, as his wife's insulter turned.

"Be off," commanded Braddock.

The intruder smiled foolishly.

"Well, Mr. John Braddock," he retorted, letting his glance drop before the blazing eyes of the incensed husband, "I don't know ez you, er yer wife, be so pow'rful 'bove folks," a nameless slur pervaded the man's tones—a slur there was no mistaking.

Braddock had been tolerant of the conditions that his wife's past had put upon a just and generous soul, in the government of his own conduct to such flickerings of the conventional view as his way might be beset with. He had deemed it wisest to ignore the ordinary sneer with which justly or unjustly the path of the fallen is prickled. Yet there could be no middle course, here; and the surge of passion welling up within the breast of Nance's husband was such that other and even better men than John Braddock have been swept away by it—the passion of incensed and indignant rage against the defiler of the atmosphere of home.

"See here," said Braddock in a tone of studied self repression and grasping the other's shoulder,—when the trespasser threw off the hold.

"Oh, I knew your wife; what wuz she?" was the fellow's coarse and unfeeling retort.

At this John grew livid. There was a large, red-painted iron vase holding earth and flowers standing near and, being a powerful, muscular man from his early farm training, he tore this from the ground with a single

wrench and swung it to one side as if it had been an Indian club.

"John!" screamed Nance. "Go—go—he'll kill you," she shrieked, appalled at the fearful look upon her husband's distorted and passion inflamed countenance, and endeavoring, by wild and excited gestures, to drive the threatened and miserable man away.

John Braddock heard his wife's agonized screams, and quickly remembered himself. He at once quietly put the vase down.

"Zeke Smithin," he said steadily, "if I ever catch you here again, I shall kill you."

"Rough words, like chickens, Mr. John Braddock, come home to roost, said Ezekiel Smithin as he moved off sulky and whipped.

"No trouble, I hope," called a voice from the gate, and the brother of De Braddock saw Brad Simons standing on the walk without, where, unnoticed, he had been a witness of the recent scene.

"No," replied John Braddock, none too well pleased at having an affair of this kind observed by another and that other, Brad Simons.

And Simons proceeded on his way, with this fateful link of memory to supply, one day, a completer chain of poor John's troubles.

Nance Braddock was a woman of handsome face and form. Her dress was in the old style, with wide collar and flowing sleeves and of a red material which contrasted effectively the dark hair and Brunette, Gipsy like features of its owner. Plain, old fashioned drop earrings and, at the throat, a gold rimmed brooch, in which was a miniature of John, further picturesquely added to her costume.

John Braddock, in a general merchandise store, by hard work and close application had become a partner,

where beginning as a clerk and bookkeeper. He possessed the rich, olive complexion characteristic of a part of his family; a strong Roman nose; a face inclined to be rugged and bony, like that of his father Uncle Peter Braddock, and wore a long mustache matching in color his heavy, dark, waving hair. He was of a tall, well developed figure, neatly dressed in clothing of a gray mixture and presented, all in all, the active appearance of a prosperous and well to do man of country business.

John Braddock, wisely ignoring further reference to the occurrences that had just transpired, made his way to the house. His wife followed.

"John," said Nance, "Tom is here." There was, in the woman's humble tones, an apology filled with a sense of the relation that this subject of her brother Tom bore to the patience, the good nature and tolerant wisdom of her beset and much tried husband.

"Why did you not call him out, when—?"

"When that man insulted me?" Nance glanced hastily at her husband. "Tom has already gotten himself in a bad enough fix. I thought you could not be far off."

"Well, well," replied the country trader kindly, "we must make the best of poor Tom, as we try to do of everything—I know how you feel. Where is he, Nanny?"

"In the parlor," rejoined Nance in a subdued voice. "John," here exclaimed the woman impulsively, and giving rein to her feelings, "you are, I believe, the best man in the world. Yes, you are," insisted the moved woman, when her husband made as if to protest, and throwing her arms around his neck,—“I know you are.”

"Nonsense, Nancy, the shoe's on the other foot. There, there, don't give way," said her husband pacifyingly, for Nance was sobbing on the breast of the devoted man who held her in his arms. "Come, Nanny,

I'll see Tom, at once,—there!" and John kissed away his wife's tears, and proceeded to interview his wife's incorrigible brother.

As John Braddock entered the room which Nance had indicated as being occupied by Tom Bolers, he perceived the object of his quest seated in an attitude of profound dejection and despair; and, with head sunk upon his breast, waiting for his sister's husband to open the trying interview.

This John immediately did, though kindly.

"Tom," said the business man as he entered the room, "what now? I thought we had arranged our affairs as satisfactory as was possible, when we last discussed them. What new troubles have brought you back to me?"

"Why, ye see," responded Bolers spurred by the recollection of his late meeting with Brad Simons and evincing some tact, while it was evident he had no share of the limited culture which his sister possessed, "I come down ter talk over a' idee that jes' happened lately ter come inter my head about this Brad Simons biz'ness. I thought, maybe," continued the man moistening his lips and hesitating, and then proceeding abruptly as if to overcome any lurking irresolution,—"I thought as how Brad Simons might be fetched to let up wethout that note er nothin'."

"All right, Tom, let's hear," said the other still kindly, although eying his unpromising brother in law narrowly and keenly. "Out with it," added the speaker perceiving his visitor, once more, hesitate. "Though I tell you, plainly, Brad must be paid."

"Ye know," went on Tom thus directed, "Brad 's—well, ye know, he's rich—made it, himself—jes' like you've bin gittin' on, though ye ain't got ez much, an'—

truth is, ye know 's well as me, he's mighty sot on yer sister—"

"Tom," said John Braddock, soberly interrupting the anxious and hurried speaker, and yet preserving, in recollection of Nance, an air of consideration,—while he spoke with far greater force than he had, heretofore, employed, "you must not bring my sister into this. I cannot understand why you come to me, again—Simons and I settled the matter."

Tom Bolers, who knew more of the amiable workings of Mr. Simons' secret mind than the other could, was perforce obliged to maintain a silence under the merchant's hopeful observations. He shifted restlessly in his chair, however, and, by other outward and visible signs, gave evidence of a mind inwardly and spiritually ill at ease.

Braddock looked with quick suspicion at his companion.

Simons has broken his promise to me, has he?" said Tom Bolers' brother in law.

Bolers nodded his head.

John Braddock thought rapidly. He knew of De's aversion to Simons. Nevertheless, she and the family might without harm have some influence with him.

"I'll tell you, Tom, what I'll do," gravely proposed the country business man, after a weighty pause; "I'll write my folks and have them say a good word for you with Brad,—but that's all; and that's all that's possible."

This was something, though Tom was shrewd enough to know it was little; but with this Tom Bolers was obliged to content himself or rather, in view of the character of satisfaction afforded him by Simons' recent cheerful references to the penitentiary, it may be more accurately stated that, with John Braddock's conclud-

ing expressions, Tom Bolers was forced to *discontent* himself.

It was thus the letter handed Mother Braddock, by Bob Likkum, was inspired and written.

The door of the room, in which Nance's husband and brother were holding their consultation, opened as Mr. Braddock uttered his final words, and a little head of dark, irregularly tossed hair thrust itself within the apartment.

"Papa," said the child Nanny, "mama says tell you supper's ready."

The father, in his chair, partly turned, with a bright smile.

"You talking about that old Brad Simons?" exclaimed the child. "I just hate him. He's a bad, wicked man."

When Tom Bolers left John Braddock's house he met Zeke Swithin, whom John had threatened to kill, and Zeke, with an oath, scowled at Bolers and said, "that he'd make the words John Braddock had used ag'in' him, afore his wife that day, the cause of bringing Mr. John Braddock down."

And, one day, it so fell out.

And Rachel Bolers and Brad Simons and Jason Jump danced, with the other merry, merry phantom shapes, gleefully around, around in the gay and lightsome frolic.

CHAPTER XIV.

A POLITICAL VISITATION; AND A BANK ROBBERY.

Simons' naturally evil and infirm temperament did not leave him long at rest, after he had yielded to Jason Jump's urgent insistence that Mrs. Walker and her daughter be extricated from the objectionable clutches of Swarth Blazes, at Washington; and, in spite of the continued devotion of the cattleman to the beautiful person and character of De Braddock, led away by the bewildering beauty of Mona's gold-bronze locks and the other attractions of her fascinating person Brad soon began to show a questionable partiality for Mona Walker.

By adroit and apparently well meaning arrangements and assurances, it was not long before he had Mona's mother consent, in the capacity of housekeeper, to take charge of his home which, by death of parents, had been left to his keeping in bachelorhood.

The daughter, for a while, was enabled to teach school, under Brad's agreement with Jump to secure for her reputable employment; and Mona, of course, lived with her mother at Simons' place.

But death winnows the harvest; and Mona's mother was selected by the hand of the winnower to leave the grain here and add to the seed of hereafter.

When the mother died, the daughter gave herself up to unrestrained grief; and, after her first deeper sorrow had subsided, was soothingly urged, by Brad Simons, to take the place of her mother in the care of his domestic establishment.

This, at first, she, of course, positively refused to do. She was supporting herself in comfort, by teaching. Brad pressed his request, offering a handsome increase in salary over that which she received as a teacher. She still held out against his inducements. Finally, being alone in the world and without other home, at the time, than that in which she and her mother had lived with the cattle merchant, Mona was persuaded to listen to a proposal, on Brad's part, to marry her at a future day. So determined had Simons become in an unscrupulous and unworthy design upon the lonely young woman (he had not abandoned his pursuit of De Braddock), that he was brought to sign a marriage agreement with Mona Walker, thinking to adjust with money his wrong to the girl, after proposed betrayal of his intended dupe. The written understanding, which afterward played so marked a part in the life of Brad Simons, was voluntarily proposed, by Brad himself, at a critical time when he saw his victim wavering. It was entered into in all good faith by the innocent and motherless girl; who, however, to the end—in her somewhat isolated position—remained unaffected by the dishonorable and treacherous purposes of the base and unworthy schemer.

In this general and varied situation of the drama and its relative emotions, Swarth Blazes happened by the grace of politics, to visit Indiana.

Mr. Blazes does not continue with us to the end of our performance; and hence his brief and final appearance, in the near future, shall be presented as effectively as possible.

The interstate relations existing between political parties had caused those of Mr. Blazes' faith to invite Mr. Blazes to come from his nearby state to take part in the campaign interests of the Hoosiers; and the Honorable Swarth, much to his surprise and confusion, found

himself, one day, face to face with Jason Jump, to whose meritorious and praiseworthy efforts Mona Walker, now in charge of Mr. Simons' domestic establishment, owed her present immunity from the advances and attentions of Mr. Blazes' official character, at Washington.

It is asserted by those familiar with the affairs of the locality treated in this story, that the ill odored and evil organization, of which these pages must needs take notice, in those days gradually became secretly mixed up with general interests until, at last, there was scarcely a concern that was not affected in some way by its subtle, unscrupulous and fear inspiring schemes. In this state of things, it is not a matter of surprise that politics should have become involved with the doings of Black Hank and his band of outlaws.

It has been no secret, thus far, that the sinister leader of outlaws has presented, behind the veil, the morally defaced and distorted features of Jason Jump, the ruined congressional claimant. So artful and successful had he been in his identification with the outlaws, that none other save Brad Simons knew the two roles—Jason Jump and Black Hank—to be performed by one and the same actor.

And the pity of it! No luminous and farreaching fields of martial glory and of conquest, such as, in revolutions of people against injustice, through all the mighty ages of the past have blazoned the dazzling pages of the world's history, cast their glamor and their light over this darkened and miserable soul, or surrounded its paltry and sorrowful deeds with the acclaim of blaring trumpets, of rolling drums or of shouting multitude. The dense and callous age of greedy and of grasping commercialism, where the clothman's narrow yard stick had superseded the more brilliant romance of brave sentiment and of daring and gallant chivalry, left nothing for the

unfortunate, however sadly deluded into whatever deplorable course of life, but the spectral and despairing possibility of subsistence. The strong arm of the law of the new Western World only too surely held in check all aim at the chimerical establishment of a change in social system, by means of lawless violence and rebellion on such a plane of general revolt. It made Jason Jump look small, like a breathless and exhausted bounty jumper spent with flight; a poor and abandoned deserter in a soiled and tattered uniform; a hopeless effigy of a would be and undesirable hero, in a tortuous way across the battlefield of human existence.

—Such, too, is as a crevasse in the vast levee which holds in the mighty stream of humanity,—the little thread of water that trickles over the dam,—the forerunner of some vaster movement of the floods that will, unchecked, yet sweep all before it.

Is it not better to repair the crevasse, before the entire embankment is swept away? A few bags of unselfishness will do it.

The town of T——, where the political meeting calling upon Mr. Blazes was to take place, on the day set for the old fashioned barbecue began early to fill up with farmers from the adjoining farms. The miscellaneous population of a country region swarmed everywhere. The street fakir from abroad—who plied his arts, on the corners, and sold his wonderful wares with a soap box for a platform, and a tripod counter over which to dispense his marvelous humbugs, and beguiled the unwary into testing his nostrums and using his whetstones—came out strongly and effectively.

Forsooth! Bob Likkum, with Ann Mariah at his side, bought both whetstone and attractive bogus drugs; and, afterwards, threw both—but, stay; that anticipates, too soon, Likkum's stirring adventure. There was to be an

ox roasted whole; and, the days of prohibition not having stifled free indulgence, the American voter did not criticise the flood of liquid inspiration with which the feast would eventually be washed down. It was a jolly enough crowd, in all conscience, for an oldtime, hilarious, roistering campaign gathering.

Zach Stoner, the county sheriff, and West Flank, Uncle Peter Braddock and a tailing off of old friends and neighbors, when the time for the political speeches and addresses had arrived, bore down upon the grounds where the "speakin'" was to be. Mona Walker, with Parson Woods acting as a species of escort, mixed with the crowd, and nodded gratefully to Jason Jump whom, since the service rendered her and her mother, at Washington, she had scarcely seen. Jump gazed after her trim, pretty figure wistfully. Some ill conditioned yokel, in the motley throng, nudged a comrade near him, as the school teacher went by, and made a remark far too strongly colored with the grosser terms of admiration of the sex. Here, Bob Likkum demonstrated the uses to which both medicines and whetstones might be profitably put.

"What 'd you say?" said Bob, stopping abruptly in front of the utterer of the derogatory speech.

"You—" and the man finished his reply to Likkum's inquiry with a stream of unrepeatable language.

"I guess you kin take this medicine fer yer morals," composedly returned Likkum, "an' whet yer blunted understandin' weth this here whetstun'," and the astonished and reprimanded blackguard, without warning of what was coming, caught both bottle and stone squarely in the face. "You smart Alecs," concluded Bob, "'ll leave our teachers an' wimmen alone."

Sheriff Stoner grabbed the unruly spirit who had provoked Likkum's assault; and Bob, whose influence

politically and otherwise was considerable, moved on unmolested, leaving the defeated rowdy to summary ejection from the grounds.

Esau wandered up to an oldtime blackleg who, with a shell pea outfit, had suddenly inspired the fat boy with a hope and prospect of realizing unlimited wealth.

"You kum away from there," said Likkum who seemed to be everywhere, trying to rescue all and everybody from the injustice of their kind. Bob took Esau by the arm, led the boy away and explained to him the trap he had rescued him from.

We must, however, no longer be deprived of the vital salvation waiting in the real functions of this occasion. Let the roasted ox be eaten; the good drink be drunk; fakirs fake in the good, old way; lovers love, in the same—and all the rest of it. Bob, we do not think, for a moment, of course, might save all! Oh, no. And, so a congressman—an unselfish politician and savior of his country—an illuminating political master and orator must come to the front—must fill the breach. He comes—he fills it.

Swarth Blazes ascends the speaker's platform. There is a hush.

He begins by telling a mighty multitude of thirsting and eager hearers what he feels, in his appreciation of the solemn responsibility under which he rests to rescue them. It is well that they have tried and trusted leaders to appeal to—to listen to. The mission of those leaders is to save the people. It is, indeed, greatly needed that the people be saved, and that the member of congress save them. He must tell his hearers of the beauties of their country—as managed by himself; of the fair land of liberty—he performing the office of liberator; of the wonders of perfection and the blessings they enjoy—in his manufacture and brand, and of the loss, the incon-

ceivable and irreparable loss, they would sustain should they but dream, for a moment, of putting the freedom factory into any other hands than his or possibly those of a few lesser great men.

William White was much impressed with the sincerity and undoubted applicability of the political utterances of the impassioned and eloquent orator. He turned to De, whose companionship he had secured for the day in spite of the growing objections of Uncle Peter Braddock to a visionary and unknown writer as a possible son in law.

"The country is surely rescued, by our present social and political system," he drily exclaimed to his intelligent and comely companion, "from utter destruction and ruin!"

De smiled in sympathetic encouragement of one in whom she, at least, had no lack of faith.

Swarth Blazes, in the foregoing, had gotten warmed up to the righteousness of his cause. He was outraged at the bare and insupportable thought of any committing the unpardonable offense of offering to transfer the government to other keeping. He—his jaw fell—yes, he could not utter a word. He stared. Standing before him, not ten feet away, his pale, set face graven in the crowd and his glittering, cold, mocking steel gray eye fixing the speaker's hypocritical and paralyzed countenance, was—Jason Jump! Mr. Blazes' conclusion, that day, of his efforts to save his people, his native land, from the grasping powers of adverse and opposing unholiness is said to have been marked by fits and starts—mostly fits. The orator was observed to seek refuge, as from some haunting presence in the crowd; the throng would sway and open,—there again stood Jason Jump when, by shifting his own position, the declaimer thought he had found a portion of his audience unaffected by an

influence antagonistic to his unselfish flights. He tried, once more. Like a dreadful specter, the man, whom this political mountebank had ruined, met the latter's sight. The speaker wiped the perspiration from his streaming face with his handkerchief; whispered to someone sitting near on the stand; stammered something to the crowd about feeling unwell, and—sat down. All enthusiasm and interest ceased as if it had never been. A pale, hard face left Mr. Blazes sitting there, forced its way through the throng and Jason Jump disappeared on the outskirts. The speaking was over.

William White watched the climax of the meeting which was brought to an end by the announcement from the stand of the sudden and unexpected indisposition of Mr. Blazes. He turned and looked after Jump's vanishing form.

"What," thought White, while something restrained him from giving utterance, to De Braddock, of his silent and absorbed speculations, "can it mean?"

"How are you feeling by this time, Mr. Blazes?" inquired a member of the committee to receive the hope of nations, after the hope had been conveyed, in a carriage, to the hotel, in the office of which he now sat.

"Only a passing faintness; I am all right."

"You were asking about Mr. Simons, I believe?" politely and incidentally observed the committeeman.

"I was," replied the visiting statesman. "Merely a matter of a cattle sale—I understand, he expects to see me before I leave town—a payment of some money due me on the transaction. Hah! he took a thousand dollar bunch." Blazes rubbed his hands together, and smiled with considerable satisfaction.

Jason Jump, sitting unseen behind a half open door, listened and was silent.

"There's your man, then," said the committee mem-

ber, catching sight of an approaching figure; and, turning, Blazes could see Brad Simons headed their way.

"Now," remarked Swarth Blazes when payment had been made to him, by Simons, in cash (which the purchaser happened to have been just paid by a crank averse to institutions of deposit that robbed their depositors, and who kept all his money in a trunk), "you have a good bank, here?"

"Our bank," rejoined Simons, "is all right."

"I will deposit this, while I'm away for a few days in the country," said Mr. Blazes.

"And after I take care of it for you, as is the duty of a friend," Mr. Jump silently and in great good humor communed with himself, as he continued to sit unseen behind the door, "I am going to elect my own member of congress."

The shadows were falling upon them that had raised the phantoms before the vision of the man, in the starlight, on the bridge, at Washington. Retribution was descending upon us who had conjured up the ill and abhorrent shapes.

A one horse chaise went by, in the dark. It was getting well along toward midnight. The country road was deserted and lonely, and the single occupant of the vehicle had been detained, by sickness, beyond the earlier hours of sleep prevailing in the primitive locality in which he ministered comfort and consolation to the sick and dying; for it was Parson Woods who drove his old sorrel when his fancy, which was rarely the case, did not impel him to ride the same. On this night, he jogged along in the chaise, giving little heed to the road and letting his mind wander at will among the thoughts awakened by his recent glimpse of the "dark river," his call having been to the bedside of one nearing the end

of the present earthly way. As he left the country highway and entered the town of T——, where he would stay for the night, he was struck, in an unusual degree, by the brooding silence of the place. The streets were tenantless and the shadows lay heavy beneath the trees lining his course. He could not account for a chilly thrill which passed over him, as he came within sight of the old building opposite the tavern, which served to house the only bank of the limited community. At the tavern, Woods drew up and got out of his vehicle. As he did so, a voice at his side softly exclaimed:

“Jest in time, parson. Yer a most accommodatin’ man, an’ ’ll lend us yer shay, I know.”

Woods turned quickly on the speaker, wondering where the latter could have been to have escaped observation, and found himself confronted by two masked men.

“What do you mean?” demanded the parson, in momentary alarm.

“Not quite so loud,” cautioned the one who had opened the agreeable negotiations with the minister for the use of the preacher’s conveyance; “not quite so loud, parson, er we might hev’ to do somep’n’ we mout be sorry for,” and the soft spoken adviser displayed the menacing barrel of a pistol before the fascinated clerical gaze, effectually arresting the poor pastor in any further idea he might have had of making a lawful outcry. “Now then, lookee here, ef ye open yer mouth,” said the man with the weapon, dropping his softer tones of speech and delivering himself in an intense hissing threat, “I’ll blow yer d——d head off! Here, Hen, fix ’im out; an’ wait fer me,” and, while the ready Hen bound and gagged the unlucky man of the gospel, the other ruffian first enforced obedience, on the part of Parson Woods; when, replacing his pistol in his pocket

and directing the depositing of Woods on the covered porch of the inn, he crossed the street to the bank which seemed to be the object of his designs. The miscreant, who had bound and otherwise secured the owner of the vehicle, apparently knew the part he had to play; for he remained behind, sharing his attention between the captive and a close watch upon the street.

There was a passing horseman—a belated farmer, and the outlaw at the tavern drew close to the bound man on the porch. The horseman passed on; and the speechless and unhappy parson was forced to listen to the hoofbeats die gradually away in the distance. He strove desperately, but without avail, to free himself from his bonds.

It had now long since passed the hour of midnight.

The ruffian left to guard the man of religion, as well as to watch the vicinity without the little bank building, remained vigilantly in the shadows of the trees that lined the walk. There had apparently been little risk, thus far, in the attempt upon the crude and primitive institution of finance as, doubtless, Black Hank had anticipated there would be. The night watchman for the bank, of a wayward and unreliable disposition at best, sometimes staid around and sometimes did not; and this time did not. The outlaws had seen to it that he did not. There was no sound—nothing stirred; and presently, from the insecure and common structure supplying quarters for a place to transact financial business in that early settlement of farmers and commerce, came Black Hank bringing a heavy box. With difficulty he succeeded in conveying his burden to the preacher's chaise across the way where Hen, the freebooter's lieutenant, waited in watchful guardianship of the street and the captured owner of the conveyance. The two

placed the case in the minister's vehicle and sprang in beside it.

Woods, lying gagged and otherwise disabled where the robbers had cast him in the shadows of the tavern porch, had not been idle, but, with the faith that was in him and a deep and silent prayer upon his lips to the Master Whom he served, had, at last, contrived to loosen his bonds; and, as the midnight marauders started to whip up the old sorrel into a pace befitting the necessities of flight, succeeded in displacing the gag preventing speech. As the whip struck the flank of his patient and faithful animal, the man of God let out a cry of warning and alarm that sounded upon the still silence of the night like the crack of doom. With a curse Black Hank whipped up the sorrel. Like his master and owner, the old horse, upon occasion, had spirit and dashed into the middle of the road. Parson Woods, by this time free of his fetters, was on his feet; and, in deafening tones mixed, it is hinted, with the most picturesque and unorthodox profanity, was wildly shouting after the rapidly moving conveyance, as he pursued it at high speed and hatless down the middle of the street. One of the escaping outlaws turned and fired, happily without effect. The sounds, the shot and confusion aroused and brought upon the scene of action and excitement the one constable of the town, who issued hastily from a remote and doubtful retirement. Drawing an ancient Colts revolver from his pocket, he incontinently banged away, the explosion bursting upon the rural region like a bombardment of Gibraltar. It is not known whether the energetic officer mistook the flying figure of Parson Woods for an unlawful disturber of the peace, or not—no one was hurt, and Swarth Blazes' thousand dollars was gone.

The silence of far advanced night lay upon rock and

tree and briar tangled wilds. Now and again could be heard the sharp crackling of underbrush as the rustling form of a night prowling animal broke the stillness. A whippoorwill called somewhere in the wood, and another seemed to answer. Presently, a crunching over the rocks and a smothered curse at the brambles told of the approach of human feet. At the same instant, a figure, seeming to start up out of the base of the solid rock, became vaguely outlined against a stony cliff near where the sounds were approaching. Once more, from the lips of this apparition sounded the call of the whippoorwill. An answering note came from the region where still crunching and cursing, the other night's visitant or visitants labored in progress through the bushes. The latter parted, and out upon an open space in front of the cliff came two men bearing between them a heavy box. The shadowy form—that of a man—first seen, now came forward.

“You got it, all right and proper, didn't you? Dang it, Hank, but you're a good one, and that's no mistake, neither,” gruffly essayed the lookout, in a manner of congratulation.

“They'll want these here *see-curities and coin* at ther bank in the mornin', an' they won't get 'em,”—the box had been deposited, for a breathing spell, upon the ground; and the low tones in which Hank's reply was made were supplemented, through the speaker's great black beard, by a laugh conveying much facetious and satirical humor. The bank robber wiped the perspiration from his face with a soiled and much used handkerchief, which he drew from his pocket with a flourish.

“Have any trouble?” asked the outlaw lookout.

“No—t's only an' ol' shell ter git into. Jes' walked right in, same 's if I drewed my little old check; got th' stuff, an' here 'tis.—How's th' old gal?”

“Looney, ’sfar ’sI kin see,” replied the robber’s informant indifferently. “Better git thet swag hid away, hedn’t ye?” he added.

Thus cautioned, the booty was lifted from the ground and the robbers vanished amidst the rocks and bushes.

The countryside, the following morning, rang with the robbery of the T—— bank. That institution of finance had been stripped of its cash and its securities, and was forced to go to the wall. There was a panic among the depositors; and T—— was wrought up to a frenzy of excitement. The entire municipal police force consisting of the constable and an unassuming tin star, and reinforced by two idle young men who loafed about the saloons, made dashing and courageous raids upon the outlying country, but nothing was discovered. The guardians of the peace would again return to the population of the distracted town; receive graciously, if secretly, numerous refreshing “bracers” from the grateful populace bent on showing its appreciation of the custodians of their law, and, wiping the police mouth with the back of the police hand, the raiders would again fare forth after the violators of the community. But this could not continue for always. Evening came, and the seekers for the perpetrators of the robbery were compelled to point to the tin star with a sad and melancholy admission of its failure. *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

Thus, in the uncertainty of human affairs, the little fortunes of the frugal locality were swept away; and William White, a depositor in the local bank, saw himself practically penniless. A small property, off which he had contrived to subsist, had been waiting for some savings to amount to enough to pay off its mortgage; and White foresaw the loss of his main support in the robbery of the bank, and in the consequent disappearance of his little accumulation. There were, likewise,

securities and valuable papers taken; and the growing though still undeveloped community experienced a shock that was destined to be felt in many ways. Brad Simons was a limited sufferer; but more especially was his housekeeper Mona Walker affected by the misfortunes of the bank, and in a way, too, that would add very materially to Mr. Simons' defeat and overthrow.

White accepted, without complaint, the issue that fate had thrust upon him; and none ever heard him allude to the matter of the bank robbery in any lasting or unhappy terms of discontent or diminished faith in the objects of the future.

CHAPTER XV.

SHADOWS CROSS THE SUN.

William White, let it be remembered, has been characteristically described by Bob Likkum as a “ ‘roses-red,-violets-blue,-sugar’s-sweet,-and-so-are-you’ poet-and-writer-chap.” Likkum only shared that peculiar prejudice in regard to White, which practical communities, in those days, entertained for budding literary genius, the world over. White had been made shy by the doubt which the farm region had in general seen fit to bestow upon his unobtrusive talents. It was only upon particular occasions,—as that, for instance, of an eclipse of the sun,—that the literary man felt the presence of a stranger occurrence, than even that attending his own literary performances, would permit him to move about in the view of men and women with something like comfort. So, on the afternoon of the eclipse, when Bob Likkum had brought Martha Braddock her letter from John, the outelass visited De.

It is needless to say that De herself did not view William’s accomplishments with the doubtful scrutiny bestowed upon them by an unappreciative neighborhood. On the contrary, her estimate of the young writer’s abilities went to an extreme of exalted admiration. When, this afternoon, William reached the gate, the maid blushing and prompted by the friendly and amiable Bob Likkum came from the house with eager welcome.

William White was of the blonde type. His hair curled closely about a finely shaped head, giving a

classical effect to an intelligent face. He had been an athlete at college and, though not of a large frame, was endowed with graceful proportions and great reserve physical strength.

White's sweetheart had discontentedly borne in mind, with cherished seriousness and exaggerated importance,—a result of all lover's fondly biased estimate of "love's young dream,"—the unfulfilled appointment made at the schoolhouse to come and see her on the previous evening, when the writer's forcible restraint, by his lawless abductors, had prevented his coming. She looked chidingly at her lover.

"Your engagements with the widow—Mrs. Walmsey," observed Miss Braddock with an immense pretense of offense, "must consume most of your time. Why did you not come to see me, last evening?"

White felt it would serve no useful purpose to recite to De the adventure with the freebooters; and he was left but awkward ability to clear himself. However, he laughed away the pretty though affected imputation of jealous distrust of him with the widow, and said in a manner of great earnestness,

"De, life and death were in the occasion that took me elsewhere than to you, last night."

"Why! William,—why, what on earth—?" his companion started to exclaim.

When William White interrupted her with,

"Do not ask me more."

De Braddock glanced quickly up into the grave, serious face of the man at her side, and was silent.

"Have you brought your smoked glass?" she asked presently. "I suppose you are prepared," De went on, "to view the eclipse?"

"I wish all eclipses," observed William White fixing his gaze, with a quizzical manner, upon the other's face,

"would confine themselves to the sun and not embrace my hopes."

"Have your hopes lately suffered an eclipse, William?" demurely and a trifle consciously questioned the girl. "The publishers—"

"It is not a matter of the publishers; you know, very well, where my eclipse—you know," quaintly retorted the young man, "the quarter of my heaven that is in lasting and perpetual shadow," which remark accompanied by an unmistakably soft glance into the eyes before him needed no further or more satisfying explanation.

"You're a silly goose," retorted De, turning away with heightened color and fluttering heart,—“you and your eclipse. Parson Woods and Bob—Bob Likkum—are inside; come in, William, be a good boy, and,” looking shyly at her lover over her shoulder, “leave eclipses to people that study science,” which, as we all very well know, meant, “please renew discussion of your ravishing eclipse as soon as possible, if not sooner!”

De had entered the house and William White was about to follow, when the latter's attention was arrested by noises in the road. White paused a moment at the door. Some men were coming on, from the north, with a drove of cattle.

White, left alone, remained a moment on the porch, Presently, as the objects in the road drew nearer, the writer half aloud remarked,

"Simons' bunch. He's well off, too," continue the soliloquizer, "and I have nothing. He's driving, to-day," added the solitary man fixing his eyes upon the form of a horseman who, attended by two or three rough looking fellows, likewise on horseback, brought up the rear of the advancing drove. The silent figure on the porch watched one after another of the cattle pass, until

all had gone by in a cloud of dust, when the drovers themselves came abreast of the farmhouse.

"Bill," called Brad Simons addressing an assistant, as the leader and his drovers came straggling opposite the house, "you and Joe drive them on; I'll overtake you. Good afternoon," Simons hailed White. "Probably, you have not observed," called the former, "that the eclipse has commenced?" and the owner of the cattle indicated, by a gesture with his riding whip in the direction of the sun, the meaning of his speech.

The literary man's reflections had prevented his realizing the first stages of the interesting event of the day. He looked toward the sun; he raised a small piece of smoked glass, which he carried in his hand, to his eye; sure enough, a narrow line of discoloration was already seen across the outer edge of the glowing disk above.

"So I see," returned the writer; and wheeling and raising his voice he called,

"De,—Miss De, you and your mother and the others come out—the eclipse has begun."

William White's announcement brought forth the occupants of the house; and the group proceeded into the yard, where the party consisting of Parson Woods, Bob Likkum, De, Mother Braddock and White took positions to view the heavens through their pieces of smoked glass.

Brad Simons, having gotten designingly and sinisterly thus far and having seen his cattle go on ahead under the direction of his drovers, deemed it evilly advisable to go farther; and now dismounted and, tying his horse to the hitch rail by the side of William White's animal, entered Peter Braddock's dooryard and joined the party of observers of the strange and singular happening going on overhead.

"Simons," said Parson Woods, as the former came into the yard—the parson continuing, with head thrown back, to scan the heavens through his dimmed glass, and speaking without change of position,—“a very wonderful and sublime event.—Shipping cattle?”

“Very, indeed, parson,” rejoined the cattleman, with his own eyes fixed upon Martha Braddock’s pretty daughter. “Shipping cattle or the eclipse, wonderful, parson? Both create enough confusion and commotion. Yes, I’ve been getting a few head together. I’ll need the sales. The robbery of the bank has affected us all a little; although, fortunately for me, my balance happened, at the time, to be small.”

“I wuz jus’ tellin’ paw,” said Mrs. Braddock, “’at I wuz glad enough we didn’t have nothin’ in it.”

“In the bank?” rejoined Simons gazing at De Braddock. “Oh, yes,” he turned back to Martha Braddock; “the robbers got some cash and papers of mine, as well as valuable papers belonging to Miss Walker, my housekeeper.”

“Pike Plummer got pretty hard hit,” said Likkum.

“Ye’d better look out fur them outlaws, I tell ye,” enjoined Mrs. Braddock, scanning Simons, De and then the heavens.

“I had hard enough time finding my shay and old sorrel,” said Parson Woods ruefully. He looked at Brad Simons and back at the sky.

Simons turned to De.

“Good afternoon, Miss Braddock; are you eclipsing the sun?”

“Oh, jokes on the eclipse are getting so old, Mr. Simons,” retorted De with a regretful and maybe reproachful look at William White, who had failed to renew his scientific discussion, “that, really, you must give us a little rest on them.” She gave a pretty toss

of the head and, in common with the others, continued to view that farreaching and infinite space so dwarfing into insignificance the petty strifes and heartbreaks of humanity as to cause wonder how we grieve or fret or worry about anything in Life's Great Story!

"This *ee*-clipse," said Bob Likkum after a spell of silence, on the part of all,—the speaker, with the others, still viewing the lofty dome on high,—"seems sorter to me like uh man without uh home, er one o' them 'air new fangled ditchin' macheens: it's out o' all calk'lation. I 'member," went on Bob reminiscently, the party of observers straining their necks, if not their visions, at the dark shadows creeping slowly across the face of the sun, "a-hearin' ol' Cy San'ders, 'at went away to seek his fortin' out west, say ez how he'd ruther not live at home, er at all, than be without riches. Now then," added Likkum, "I'm a homebuddy myse'f, I am, an' I can't see how's any man kin be indiffrent to that 'air state uv perfeck blessedness."

Very little attention was paid, by those assembled in Farmer Braddock's dooryard, to this piece of quaint domestic wisdom from the country sage and humorist Robert Likkum. Brad Simons, however, proved an exception. He was not so intently engrossed in the sublimity of the heavens as he was occupied in viewing—if we may use the phrase—that earthly star De Braddock; and was inspired to render tribute to Mr. Likkum's wise and tender observation. With his gaze fastened upon De's uplifted features, he earnestly exclaimed:

"Right, Likkum, right; the state of no man is perfect or complete without a home or," added the cattleman, with an increased depth of emphasis, and his eyes devouring De's face, "without a wife to make it beautiful," a sentiment of enough merit to have graced even

worthier lips than those of the designing man uttering it.

"You don't say so," said Bob Likkum.

De Braddock was conscious of this last utterance, on the part of Brad Simons, whether or not Bob Likkum's sincerer first speech had reached her ears. The girl was embarrassed; and made uneasy efforts to throw off the effect of Simons' words.

"Wonder," surmised Mother Braddock watching the sky, "ef Peter an' them han's sees this meeraculous feenomynum?"

"Wall," observed Likkum drily, "possibul; ez the sky don't come to an eend this side uv Indyanop'lus."

"My neck's near broken, I know that," finally announced Parson Woods, as he lowered his gaze, letting his eyesight appreciate a kind of yellowish, subdued and ghostly light stealing over the face of the neighboring woods and adjacent fields.

"De, child," chimed in Mrs. Braddock lowering her glass and rubbing the back of her neck, "the parson's right,—you'll jes' simply break the back uv yer neck, ef you hold it in that 'air position much longer," and, after the manner of sheep that follow their leader over the stile, one after another of the viewers of the slowly darkening heavens lowered their bits of smoked glass.

William White was watching Brad Simons and De Braddock. The power of money! Simons was rich; William was poor. "Surely," again thought White, "De must prefer Simons to himself."

And the shadows were crossing the sun.

Bob Likkum standing with William White, and as if reading the latter's thoughts, put in:

"I calk'late, Billy, I wouldn't let any 'tarnal fish like Brad Simons snake *my* gal off,"—Bob was regarding, with a careful, reserved and distant air, the actions

of Brad Simons with De Braddock. Likkum might not have approved of White's vocation; but he certainly preferred the writer personally to the cattleman.

"What can I do, Bob? I'm poor," rejoined White.

"Poor, fiddlesticks!" retorted Bob with infinite contempt, not giving the writer a chance to speak further. "I'd give dollars fer you," continued Likkum, "where I wouldn't give nothin' fur that slink, Simons."

"Thank you, Bob," said White humbly.

"Hem—ahem!" coughed Bob, conscious of having praised the popularly ostracized literary "Billy White," and yet too just and too gentlemanly to qualify his opinion. "See here," proceeded the rustic philosopher with emphasis, "humility's all right, an' it's my principle—it'll cure 'bout nigh all the troubles in the world—but ye don't want to overdo it. Don't be too back'ard er too for'ard 's *my* way. Ye're honest; an' it's more n' Brad is, I doubt. And," said Likkum, glad of an opportunity to say something that would "stand," "there's yer one arm, too. Ye went and fit. Did Simons? Nary, he didn't. Had a substitute there," and Likkum swept his arm southward where might still be fancied the rolling dunny smoke of war, signifying, by his words and action, the fact of Simons having fought by proxy in the then late rebellion.

William White had made a good soldier; and remained silent under a fit sense of credit in this respect of a record in the army.

"Besides," concluded Bob conscientiously if somewhat doubtfully sealing a final preference for White, "Brad's nothin', nohow."

The literary man stood, for an instant, pondering with his eyes turned toward Simons. Brad seemed to become conscious of White's gaze; he laughed and uttered a remark in a low tone to De Braddock standing

a little distance off, with her attention fixed on William White, constrainedly by side of Brad Simons. The girl, apparently offended, flushed and made a movement to draw back from the forward cattleman. There was evidently a hasty apology from Simons.

Parson Woods' solemn voice was heard:

“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork.”

Like a flash, coming from no quarter of which any present had previously been aware, there appeared in the midst of the gathering the weird, uncanny form of a woman, who threw her long, thin arms above her head, her claw like fingers clutching and unclutching in the air and pointing at the vanishing sun. She was between forty and fifty years of age; and of the meager, drawn features of those whose minds are flighty and diseased. She wore a coarse, drab, homespun garment that hung loosely about her tall, gaunt figure.

As the wild form of the woman glided in among the others, her arms and fingers extended, her hand unconsciously struck, as it brushed past Bob Likkum, against the latter's uplifted grasp containing a fragment of smoked glass, causing the last object to fall to the ground.

“Let it lay—let it lay,” cried the demented creature;—“it sp'iled the sunlight fur my Nancy;—let it lay;—but find *him*,—he hides the sun;—let it lay.”

Bob Likkum stooped and picked up the piece of discolored glass, and stood with it idly in his hand; De's mother shrank to the side of her daughter; White remained a silent spectator; Parson Woods made a movement to pacify the crazed being, and Brad Simons took a step in her direction.

“It's Rachel Bolers. There's no harm in her,” said Simons breaking the spell. “Rachel,” continued Brad,

drawing nearer to the woman, "come, come, you must not stay here."

"Who says I can't stay?" shrilly exclaimed the woman,—“who says it? I want the man 'at blasted my Nanny's life and her mother's,—me and my Nanny. You ain't him, air ye?” suddenly queried she, breaking off in her impassioned strain and gazing into the face of Brad Simons; “fur ef ye wuz, I'd kill ye,” and the distracted woman, singularly calm now, looked like some dread spirit of judgment.

“No, no,” exclaimed Simons, in what appeared to be unnecessary haste stepping back; “of course, not. I know nothing of your daughter Nancy's affairs, Mrs. Bolers.”

“Nothing—nothing,” echoed Rachel Bolers. Her paroxysm of a moment since was gone, and her voice took on a low, moaning sound. “Someone knows. I'll find him. When I do, I'll be his judgment,” and the speaker, here, trailed off into an unintelligible, wailing kind of insane gibberish.

“Oh! do send her away,” cried Mother Braddock, to whom, as to all the inhabitants of that region, the harmless person of Rachel Bolers was familiar. Mother Braddock had her own special dislike and prejudice for one who, like Rachel, was a suggestion—particularly a crazed one—of the subject so distasteful at best to the worthy wife of Peter Braddock,—the subject of her son's marriage to Nance Bolers, Rachel's daughter.

Brad Simons, who had appeared abashed and in an unaccountable manner silenced by Rachel Bolers' question concerning identity of his own with the abuser of the confidence of the distracted woman's daughter, upon Mrs. Braddock's direct injunction to send Rachel away advanced.

“Go,” ordered the cattleman peremptorily.

The crazed woman appeared to have one of those rare bursts of momentary intelligence which sometime visit the mentally unbalanced. She did not speak for a moment; and her keen glance, with not a wholly irrational stare, searched Brad Simons' watchful face lowering darkly at hers. Straightening herself to her full height, and, in a voice of piercing and thrilling tone and force, she cried:

"You're him—you're th' man 'at stole my Nanny, afore she married Johnny Braddock," and Rachel shook her bony and emaciated hand in Simons' face.

The effect of this speech was electrical. Brad recoiled from the accusing woman's fierce and threatening glance. In the unnatural dusk of the eclipse he grew white and burning red by turns. Animated by just indignation, as thought all but Bob Likkum, Brad Simons, recovering, started forward. Then, recollecting himself, he faced the assembled company with the appearance of a smile of good natured tolerance upon his round, florid countenance, which changed, however, to a look of hatred when he turned to the reputed mad woman.

"Look," said Simons addressing himself to Rachel Bolers, his face becoming hard, stern and set; "we've had enough of this—be off. You're a public nuisance; and, if you continue your tantrums about the country, I'll have you placed where you may be restrained from driving people beside themselves with your foolery."

"The man," muttered the woman, her gaze bent upon the ground,—“but his name—I furgit,” and the subdued creature lifted a vacant and meaningless eye to the attentive countenances about her. “Ah!” she cried abruptly, raising her voice once more to the high, weird pitch at which she had spoken on her first appearance; “I know—I left him and his name in the wood

by the river,—I'll go get 'em. I can't see the sun, when he's in front of it," and, with a movement as swift and fleeting as that by which in the beginning she had appeared, the mad thing was gone—around the house and out through the fields to the woods and river beyond, in the course whence she had as swiftly though unnoted come.

There was a feeling of general relief upon her disappearance, and Brad Simons removing his hat passed his hand over his burning brow as though suffering from the summer heat.

Bob Likkum never forgot this scene; and, from that day, had his own opinion of Simons; but was forced to keep it to himself in the face of the mental irresponsibility of the only source of that opinion.

William White who, up to this time, had, in the state of his failure to learn the mad woman's secret, maintained a discreet silence on the subject of his enforced visit to the caverns in the hills, saw the spectral form of Rachel Bolers disappear with a feeling of renewed foreboding for the future of his beloved, De Braddock, which filled him with unrest. Still, too wise to give voice to his apprehensions where no tangible reasons could be assigned, the troubled writer continued silent. All effort, on his part, to solve the riddle had, so far, failed.

"John." said Brad Simons to De and Mother Braddock, while all remained standing in the dooryard following Rachel Bolers' departure, "certainly has enough to bear, with both Nance's mother and the brother to take care of!" The speech was a cunning one. Brad, in its delivery, already knew, through Tom Bolers, of John's recent letter to his mother in Tom Bolers' interest.

And Mother Braddock, remembering John's letter

bespeaking their friendly offices with Brad Simons on behalf of Nance's brother, answered with a sigh and an appealing look at Simons.

"Yes."

And the sun in the heavens above fell under complete shadow; and the dog whined, and Brad Simons, with a look of coming power, fixed his gaze upon De.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNCLE PETER BRADDOCK.

"Well, mother, here be the men—hungry 'nuff t'eat ye out o' house'n home," was the observation of Peter Braddock, by the country people familiarly called "Uncle Peter," when, as the harvest "hands," on the evening of the day of the eclipse, passed on to the barn with the horses, he came stumbling into the kitchen where Mrs. Braddock was preparing supper.

"All right, Peter; right away," answered Mother, bustling about.

Uncle Peter, thus satisfied, went on to the barn to join his neighbors.

"De," called Mother Braddock looking around. De was nowhere to be seen. "Where," exclaimed Mrs. Braddock, "kin that child have went."

Mother Braddock had just lifted her head previously bent over the frying pan on the stove. Her face was flushed in the preparation of the evening meal. She went to the door and looked out.

It was dusking a little in the west. The indescribable influence of approaching evening was being felt. The solemn hush imperceptibly creeping, in the natural closing hours of the day, over the surrounding fields and landscape; the frogs awakening to the fact that it was nearing time for the evening concert; the drowsy chirp of the crickets; the birds welcoming the hour of nests and rest, and uttering soft, low, loving chirpings of "good night;" the chickens beginning to seek their

roosts in the trees; the cattle impressed with the time of stilly moments stealing away to the night's great highway,—everything was conspiring to take the load from the back of day and transfer it to the waiting caravan bound through those mysterious defiles of slumber, darkness and day's surcease.

Sleep! The tired mind, the weary soul, the loving slave through hours and days and nights of waking—sleep. O careworn, sleep; O heartache, sleep. O dreamer, with your broken dreams and broken heart, sleep, sleep. Upon the toiling day and far advanced night of exhausted effort, toil and noble aspiration, drop the balm of heaven's healing slumber and oblivion!

At the barn, Uncle Peter Braddock and the men were chatting, joking and laughing while they put away the horses for the night, after a day of harvest.

The barnyard, enjoying during the day the quietude of absent farm life, now resounded with the nickers of horses welcoming their evening meal, the stamping in the stalls of horses' feet, and the sudden explosion of boisterous and hearty laughter, when an unusually good jest had been uttered, or where the ever present practical joker, creeping slyly up behind the unwatchful countryman, unexpectedly tore away the rudely improvised seat of rough board supporting one end on a log, sending the resting and tired harvester sprawling upon the ground. Snatches of vocal country melody primitively appealing to the unconventionally erotic, and otherwise, were offered by the characteristic musical genius of the locality, neighborhood and occasion, and many and varied sounds of hilarious and strong, healthy life, evidencing the men's arrival from the fields, greeted the ear.

"Here, ye cub," shouted Uncle Peter, seeking the attention of the fat and somewhat easy-moving Esau,

"where air ye? Them chickens wants tuh be looked arter. Git around. Where air ye, anyway?"

Esau, the generously proportioned farm boy, was spied, at this point, by Uncle Peter; and was seen to be quite indifferently and contentedly enjoying a few moments of natural relaxation, in social intercourse with one of the farm "hands," who had paused at the wash bench, in the farmer's dooryard, and was liberally dousing his face in a tin wash basin of water. Promptly and unfeelingly interrupting an intensely interesting discussion of the latest doings of Black Hank's luridly and dazzlingly picturesque aggregation of humane social advantages—a conversation being animatedly carried on by the "hand" and Esau—Peter yelled:

"Ye lazy, shiftless crittur, ye, git to them there chickens, will ye? Ye feed 'em—yet let 'em stray 'way, ye do!" Peter was a little severe, but it was country life. "Them Plymouth Rocks is darn nigh all bu'sted, owin' to ye, ye cub, an' them Leghorns hev' gone, with them Cochinchinies, on the'r legs to China, fur all I know."

Esau grumbled some; but knew better than to thwart the old man, and wrenched himself from the fascinations of discussing thieves and outlaws. He went about his farm duties as directed.

"Peter," complained a neighbor—neighbors in those days helped each other in their farm work and harvesting, in return for like assistance. "I'm e'en a'most starved."

Peter Braddock, with cheerful inhumanity, ignored this said plaint and merely remarked casually, as he coolly abstracted a piece of harness from a horse he was stripping for the night,

"Heerd, terday, 'at Brad—Brad Simons an' Tom Boler uz got inter some kind uv trubble er other—

Tom's b'en up to some uv 'is mischief, ag'in, I reckon.

The suffering harvester in somber silence responded to his unappeased pangs of hunger, by kicking vigorously though ineffectually at a passing cockerel, as though he might have harbored a cannibalistic desire of dispatching the fowl and consuming it uncooked.

"Don't know nothin' about it. I say, Peter," stoutly persisted the distressed subject, "I'm dyin' fer food, I tell ye."

"I calk'late," said Peter, continuing to bear a load of responsibility for human life with unexampled composure, "'at they say John had a row weth Zeke Smithin, t'other day—threatened ter kill the orn'ry euss, John did."

"Wouldn't hurt none, ef John blowed 'is dratted head off—I'm nearly dead, ye ol' hayrake," retorted the auditor, with vicious emphasis.

At this time, Uncle Peter Braddock was as much in the dark as anyone concerning the "hold," which those of that locality had come to perceive, in spite of an attempt made by John Braddock to keep the forgery quiet, that Brad Simons possessed of Tom Bolers, John Braddock's worthless brother in law. It must, also, be understood that, up to this moment, Uncle Peter had experienced no opportunity of learning the contents of John's letter to his mother. Beyond this letter, De's brother had made no confidant of his family in these whispered troubles in which Nance's brother was supposed to take so prominent a part. And, so far as concerned the mine that was surely forming under the doomed farmer and his devoted house, it may be said the old gentleman was mercifully unconscious.

And while the evening came down, Mother Braddock stood at the kitchen door and looked for De. Standing and straining her gaze in the slowing gathering dark-

ness, Martha Braddock gave an exclamation of some wonder.

“Sakes alive! why that be her, the child’s a-comin’ thro’ the pastur’. Wonder now what, in blessed mem’ry! takes her out thar’? Wall, I’m blest!” said Mrs. Braddock astutely, after a slight pause spent in discreet communion with herself; “I jes’ won’t say nothin’, ’t all, to Peter, ’cause gals will be gals, but if that little minx ain’t a-bin over there ’ith Billy White. Yes, sir,” said Martha with positive emphasis, “that be his straw hat clippin’ past the woods, now. They jes’ made it up, I do b’lieve, I do,” and communing thus with herself Mother Braddock peered into the distance with increased interest.

Whatever intimation “Billy” White may have conveyed to De Braddock concerning his subsequent intentions, he had certainly beaten a hasty retreat from the premises of Peter Braddock in anticipation of the arrival of the farmer and his following of rustic critics from the harvest field; and had transferred the scene of his operations to the banks of the neighboring river, where a stretch of wood streaked the last gleams of the evening sky.

“Vow! I seen his straw hat. Now, what’s she bin up to, wonder,” said Mother Braddock below her breath. “Wisht Peter an’ them pesky folks ’d stop makin’ fun o’ Billy an’ his his po’try and writin’. Th’ ain’t no harm in him, as I kin see, an’ they on’y drive the feller off. Wonder ef De, raley,—” by this time the subject of her mother’s speculations had passed through the big gate, back of the barn, crossed the barnyard and entered the houseyard by the gate in the picket fence, and thence come straight to where her mother was standing in the kitchen door in the growing dusk of the twilight.

"De, child," said Mrs. Braddock giving the surrounding heavens the pretense of an elaborate examination as the engaging maid tripped to her mother's side, "I was surmisin' be it 'bout ter rain. Can't make out, nohow. What d' you think?" and Mother Braddock again swept the horizon with great anxiety apparent in her manner.

"Aren't they getting the harvest in, all right?" asked the daughter, letting her sight follow her mother's to the gentle evening heavens.

"B'lieve they be," replied Martha Braddock, to whom the long continuation of false pretenses and appearances was criminal in her truthful soul. She gave a further poorly affected glance of scrutiny at the sky, and asked in a casual manner,

"Seen Billy White's straw hat out there, jes' now, didn't I?"

"Oh, yes, maw," responded the girl with perfect readiness. "William was out there, by the river, writing. I left him talking with a tramp."

Out on the banks of Lost River, William White was saying:

"Can't you get work?"

The question was addressed to a man of seedy appearance, but one who wore a certain air of free and independent bearing that distinguished him from the ordinary type of the destitute. His hands bore the tattoo marks of the seafaring; he was strong and muscular, and appeared willing and anxious to work. When he took off his hat he uncovered a ragged scar which showed above his brows.

"I can't get work," answered the man, "an' they'd as soon I wuz dead and rotting in the fields."

"You mean they that will not give you work?"

"I mean them, 'at'll not gimme no job," replied the

man under examination. "It's a hard biz'ness when ye wants a bit o' work, an' can't get it. Oh, yes, it's easy enough then to say, 'W'at's the use!' an', crack, an' it's all off," and the speaker illustrated the meaning of his speech by presenting an imaginary revolver at his head and pulling an imaginary trigger.

"I wouldn't do that, if I were you," said White.

"No, sir, I wouldn't either. I don't believe nothin', nohow, in soocieide. It's thievin'; it's takin' w'at ain't yer own—yer life belongs as much to God an' yer feller creatures, ez it does to yerself. But it's discouragin', sir, at times,—'tis, indeed, to the best uv 'em; an' that's a fack," pursued White's chance discourser. "The only place I got a chance, since I kum into this here state uv Injanny, wuz with darn thieves; and ruther'n stay with that kind o' cattle I quit. I believe it's better ter be 'onest. My mother taught me that much, ef I'm a pretty ugly ol' hulk er not."

"You say you got a chance among 'thieves'?" queried William White, whose thoughts quickly and naturally reverted to the experience he himself had recently gone through with the outlaws.

"Ye're right, cap'n,—that's what they wuz," replied the man.

It suddenly, like an inspiration, flashed across the mind of White that this might be the tramp whose unexplained disappearance, on the night of his own secret and compulsory introduction into the outlaws' cave, had given the leader of the desperadoes such concern. If so, would he likely know anything of use to De's lover, in search for information as to the meaning of his own involuntary visit to the freebooter's resort? The man might be—doubtless was—honest, as he himself had said; it would be well to find out what the tramp knew.

"I suppose you had trouble with those thieves, you speak of, and left them?" cautiously began White.

"Didn't go fur enough to have trouble with 'em," replied the writer's needy companion.

"How did you find them out—discover they were wrong, then?" asked the other.

"Why, see here, mister, I don't want to git into no onnecessary trouble, if they's nothin' to gain by it to you er me," said the man prudently.

"You can trust me, if you care to speak," returned White. "It is possible I can help you."

"Why, ye see, then, stranger," rejoined the writer's informant, casting a slow glance about as if to make sure no third person was in hearing, "these here fellers, w'at I tell you uv, wuz—"

"Yes—yes," exclaimed the eager listener, his interest growing into impatience, as the other hesitated; "go on."

"—wuz," went on the tramp, even more slowly, "a-carryin' off a man."

His own abduction, White saw, had been witnessed by his chance acquaintance.

"They were carrying off a man, were they?" observed the interested writer carelessly. "A pleasant occupation, I should say. And you saw them doing it?"

"I seen 'em, sure enough," was the ready reply.

"Could you recognize the man?"

"Can't say. 'Twuz too dark."

"And about when was this?"

The tramp described time and locality, clearly showing he had been present upon the occasion of the writer's adventure. In the instincts which had already prompted the lover of De to believe in the tramp's honesty, the former readily conceived the purpose of

employing his new ally to secretly track the outlaws, who were apparently concerned in matters affecting De Braddock's interests, and attempt to uncover their designs. Of course, it was possible that the seemingly haphazard meeting, in the woods, might be with one who had been sent by the thieves themselves to spy upon him; but William White put this supposition aside, and chose to follow his first impulse to trust his strange acquaintance.

"You did not know I was the man," remarked White, "they 'carried off'?"

The companion of the writer's experience evinced, by his manner and reply, a surprise too genuine for even a lingering suspicion to find further place in the questioner's mind.

Trust one, at all, trust him fully, is some part of wisdom. Once committed to the course which had suggested itself, the literary man lost no time in putting the other in possession of sufficient knowledge of affairs to give him an intelligent understanding of White's wants; and there was formed an alliance, which was destined to bring the most important and valuable results; but it was not until the heroism of De Braddock herself had inspired the tramp friend of White with a species of idolatry for the girl, whom William was trying to serve, that the entire country was laid under tribute by the courageous wayfarer to secure her safety and escape from the toils of Brad Simons and his kind.

"Marthy, woman," said Uncle Peter Braddock, who now came up to De and her mother, "them men is pow'rful hungry, an' wouldn't be 't all sa-prised ef ye didn't hev' ter pos'pone yer talkin', ye an' De thar', an' git 'em somep'n ter eat. B'en a-pesterin' Bob Likkum, ag'in, ye sassy baggage?" said Uncle Peter pinching his

daughter's fair cheek. "Seen him, jes' now. Sez he brought a letter frum John."

"Yes, Peter; I'll tell ye all about it, d'reckly," upon which remark Mrs. Braddock, dutifully assisted by her daughter, addressed herself to the final preparations for the evening meal.

Uncle Peter Braddock had commenced life when the more primitive farm methods were yet in vogue. The first ditching machine had filled the old man's soul with wonder. The change in plows and the gradual development of the reaper and thresher had been revolutions of the universe to him and to his associates. He was tall, straight and splendidly rugged. His age was sixty. His dark hair was just beginning to turn iron gray; but his deepset eyes were still bright and piercing. His features were strong, a little bony, vigorous and truthful, and pointed by the oldtime tuft of whiskers on the end of the chin.

His type is passing away. New men and new methods are claiming the allegiance to the past as theirs; and only the hollow echoes of the old days ring both with the faint far off notes of the pioneer's axe and his lusty, triumphant shout swelling the volume of sound through the glades of his uncleared land.

The evening meal was over and Peter Braddock followed Martha out to the springhouse.

"Where be De?" said the old man. "Brad's comin', this evenin'."

"I dunno, father, where De be," responded Mrs. Braddock, setting down a crock of milk near the cool, running spring water. Mrs. Braddock did know where De was.

"Brad's got lots of money," observed Uncle Peter.

"Yes, paw," dutifully assented Mother Braddock.

"What d'ye think?" asked Peter.

"Well, the gal ought to hev' her own ch'ice," replied Peter's helpmate.

"I don't think much o' thet there Billy White, 'ith his writin' things," said the old man.

"Nothin' wrong uv 'im," rejoined the other.

"See here." Uncle Peter was beginning to say, when he ceased abruptly. His face took on a listening expression. "Who's that, 'round in front, talkin'?" he asked.

Martha "didn't know." She did, though. It was Billy White and De at the gate. Mrs. Braddock's sympathies were all with her daughter.

"I'll jes' go 'round an' see," remarked Peter suspiciously. As he turned away he said: "We'll keep the parson, to-night."

Martha Braddock would have prevented her husband from interfering with the lovers had it been in her power. As it was, she went back to the house full of disquiet.

Peter Braddock, an honest and well disposed farmer, but one possessed of a conviction that his daughter could not advance her interests by a marriage with a man who squandered his time writing books, walked soberly around the house and, so engaged were they in each other, came upon De and White before they were aware of his approach. White was standing in the road without, close to the gate, and De was leaning on the gate, on the other side from her lover.

"Whut ye two doin', here?" inquired the farmer bluntly.

The two young people were silent.

"Will'um," said Peter Braddock, "I know'd yer father, old Sam White, 'afore ye, an' I can't hev' nothin' 'cept the kindes' feelin's fur his boy,—but, ye know, my gal is all mother an' me 's got. Book writin's

nothin', an' I hain't said it, yit, but I say it, now, thet nothin' ser'us kin kum uv this here nonsense, 'atween ye two; an' I sez, ternight, ye'd better not come aroun'. Huh?"

"Father," remonstrated De, in shocked surprise.

"He knows what I think uv his callin'," said the old farmer, obstinately; "it's thet of a beggar." He was in for it, now,—the old man was,—and he was going to see it through.

Since White's loss in the bank robbery, Mr. Braddock had been unusually severe with the author. If William's means, before the writer's impoverishment, did not redeem the writer's prejudiced calling in that community of early soil workers, little less did Uncle Peter now view with favor that which, at best, appealed to him as an entirely impractical vocation; the concluding sentiment of which comforting and highly satisfactory opinion has been shared by later and greatly advanced wisdom.

"Mr. Braddock," White, flushing in the darkness, began, when he was interrupted by De's father.

"I've said my say," dogmatically asserted Uncle Peter, whose ordinarily easy going nature was here irritated by opposition, "an' I don't want no back talk." He felt better, too, with some excuse for his extraordinary conduct to the literary object of his condemnation.

White turned as if to go, but, appearing prompted by second thought, turned back.

"Mr. Braddock, I'm sorry to be forced into words with you, in presence of your daughter, but I must tell you I am no beggar."

"Don't keer; ye can't make your salt out o' po'try writin' an' sich,—ye know it," stoutly persisted Braddock, his tones expressing an uncompromising finality.

Had William White let the matter rest there it might

have been well. He rejoined, spurred by the presence of the woman he loved,

“My calling is as good as that of a plowman.”

Peter Braddock, with the deep and abiding pride of a pioneer of the soil, looked, for a moment, as if he could not believe his ears. He swelled in the righteousness of his wrath. A book writer as good as a plowman—and the secret sneer at a tiller of the soil lurking, from a “literary feller,” in the use of the word “plowman!”

“Will’um White, ye’re crazy,” cried the old Hoosier, as soon as he was able to collect his scattered senses. I won’t do my da’ter the onjestice to think she ever cared fer ye, anyway.” De was trying to stop the coming flood with her hands on her father’s shoulders. “Ye don’t kum here, anymore,” cried the old man in tones growing louder and louder. “Book writin’ ez good ’s plowin’! De, go to yer mother.” The girl went slowly as bidden. “Now, see here, Mr. White,” concluded Peter Braddock; “there ain’t nothin’ ’s good ez ’n ’onest farmer,” and Uncle Peter, in the heat of temper, betrayed into vanity, turned, in his fury, from the literary man and followed De into the house.

“There!” said the old fellow, a moment after, to Mother Braddock; “I giv’ thet thare young freshet, Billy White, a piece uv my mind; an’ he don’t come aroun’ here no more.”

Mother Braddock only sighed.

They were all gathered together in the good, old fashioned country parlor. Here was a piano, however, given to De by her mother. A pretty pattern of “store” carpet of De’s own selection covered the floor. Simple pictures adorned the walls, and neat, white curtains, daintily caught up at the sides with red ribbons bought by De with her chicken and egg money of a passing peddler, added their own little touch of feminine charm

to the room. On the center table, in state, lay the family bible containing, in Peter Braddock's strong, characteristic writing, the records of his family tree — births, marriages and deaths. A banjo, the gift to De of William White, rested in respected silence in one corner of the apartment, testifying thus mutely and eloquently to the tuneful soul of the exiled donor.

Parson Woods was present being "put up" for the night and Bob Likkum had stopped by as he drove home in the democrat, in the evening, from The Forks, north of the Braddock farm.

De, at the piano, was singing; Bob Likkum, with his long, thin legs crossed and twisted one around the other, was nursing his knees with both hands, and Parson Woods, sitting near the piano, with eyes closed and head reclining against a high backed chair, was drinking in the rich melody of the young singer's voice, when there appeared at the open door, through which stole the faint, sweet scent of roses, the sleek, robust, unctious form of Brad Simons.

Mrs. Braddock, who sat with some knitting within easy reach of the red-shaded lamp, which sat upon the center table, at once arose and, lowering a little the smoking flame, as the singing ceased advanced in the direction of Simons.

"Speak him fair, father," Mrs. Braddock contented herself with saying in a low voice as she passed her husband, "and I'll tell ye about it later."

Uncle Peter got to his feet and greeted Simons, who could make as good an entrance and, with a fair field and no favors, infuse as much entertainment into a social gathering as the next.

De alone hung back. Simons noticed her coldness and came to her side as she sat at the piano.

"Miss Delia," said Brad Simons, with marked em-

phasis and out of all custom pronouncing the girl's full name, "it never came my way to call you by the short cut most folks use. Your full name's such a pretty one, that—"

"Call me what the other's call me or nothing," responded the girl, a touch of shortness in her tones, which, if it escaped the others, did not escape Simons or, in fact, Robert Likkum.

"Miss—Miss De," replied Simons affecting a gallantry, and pretending to stumble over assumed difficulties of the situation, "that being the case, I shall call you by the name you like best, from this to the end; for," continued the speaker, apparently bent on being agreeable, "'tis better to have called and lost, than never to have called, at all.'" Upon communicating this neat bit of paraphrase or sentiment to any or all minded to listen, Brad Simons smiled pleasantly, showed a set of strong, white teeth and turned companionably to the company. He squared himself on his feet, with folded arms, and planted himself, in an easy, familiar attitude, with his back against the piano; and continued to smile sociably.

"Will any of you go down to camp meeting, next Monday?" affably pursued Bradford Simons fixed upon prosecuting his intentions to be agreeable and entertaining, in spite of a certain constraint which, except in the case of Uncle Peter and possibly Parson Woods, had seemed to settle on the company upon Brad's arrival.

"P'raps," said Uncle Peter who, at this point, although entirely failing in comprehension touching its significance, bore in mind "mother's" injunction "to speak Simons fair;" which, together with his own partial bias in favor of Brad, keyed him to quite a tension of urbanity.

Bob cleared his throat. "Ye all know th' old song,"

pleasantly observed Robert, as he proceeded to render a bar of the vocal number which appeared to be, at that moment, working in his own recollection,

“ ‘I’ll tell ye uv a feller—
Uv a feller I hev’ seen,
He’s nuther white, nur yellor,
But he’s altogether green;

“ ‘He kem, las’ night, ter see me,
An’ he made so long a stay,
I begin ter think ther blockhead
Never meant ter go away.’ ”

Bob was so skilful in the execution of this pointed musical number, and presented it in a manner apparently at once so impersonal and innocent, that, it is possible, none beyond himself, Brad Simons and De were conscious of the meaning behind Likkum’s graceful and tune-lacking effort.

“ ‘Haw, haw, haw,’ ” burst from Farmer Braddock; why, for the life of him, he could not have told.

Mrs. Braddock had disappeared, but now returned with a liberal supply of refreshments consisting of gingerbread, apples and one of her select bottles of best elderberry wine.

“ ‘That was a brilliant effort of yours, Robert,’ ” observed Simons, with an effort to appear unconscious.

“ ‘Glad,’ ” said Bob, “ ‘you liked it. Thought you might not.’ ”

De had a growing sense of “ ‘a friend at court’ ” in Bob Likkum.

“ ‘Hem,’ ” coughed Uncle Peter.

Mother Braddock looked a trifle worried; as she might well have been.

Simons wisely concluded to dodge the issue.

"I was over to town, the other day, and saw John," said he, looking around the room at the various occupants, and endeavoring to casually if not naturally fix the attention of Uncle Peter and Martha.

"Oh, yes," a little eagerly began Mother Braddock; "I jes' got a letter frum him."

Brad wondered how far his enforced and unpleasant agent Tom Bolers had opened the way for his own further interesting operations in the matter of securing the hand of Martha's daughter.

"Do you hear often from John?" Simons asked carelessly of De's mother.

"Johnnie never writes 'cept w'en he hez somethin' partikler to say," answered Mrs. Braddock.

Brad looked at De. He, again, wondered how far this particular thing, at this time inspiring John Braddock to write home, had extended towards favoring his own passion for the girl beside him. It was almost on his tongue to put some form of his thought into words.

"John," instead, he slowly observed, "seemed to have a—" Brad appeared to hesitate—"some unpleasantness with that fellow Zeke Smithin, when I saw him."

Uncle Peter nodded his head. He had heard of it, too.

"Wall, Zeke ain't the fu'st citizen in the love uv his countrymen," remarked Bob Likkum. "He's orful orn'ry—orn'ry 'nuff to be killed," continued the speaker, however unaware, as yet, of the serious threat John Braddock had leveled at the subject of their discussion.

Brad glanced thoughtfully at Likkum: "John threatened to do it—to kill him," said he.

"Did he?" said Bob, curiously.

"Yes," said Brad.

There was a feeling of interest in the room. John Braddock was known to deal in few meaningless ex-

pressions. If he had menaced Zeke, he had had strong reason for doing so. The company was silent.

"It wouldn't be much loss," at last said Bob, unconsciously voicing the sentiments of the farmer who, in the barnyard that same evening, had reckoned with Uncle Peter on Smithin's alleged worthlessness.

"Don't know but whut you're about right, Bob," assented old Peter Braddock, drumming thoughtfully with his fingers on the arm of his chair. "Zeke's awful triflin', I tell you. Kem aroun' the place, here, t'other day, he did—mebbe arter his affair with John. He got so brash, I driv' him off'n the place, I did. He went away mutterin' threats, an' growlin' out about the red cock crowin' in ther barn."

"Oh, father," exclaimed Mother Braddock, "d'ye know what that means? That's Gipsy talk. That means he'll burn the barn!"

"Guess not," satisfiedly returned the old man.

Uncle Peter had no sooner given utterance to these last words than,

"Fire," yelled the fat farmboy Esau, dashing wildly into the room. The boy was fat enough and his face red enough, and he appeared conspicuous enough in the instantaneous confusion that resulted from his sudden entrance and announcement. They all rushed pell mell, helter skelter out to the stable, which Esau pantingly added was the unlucky object being consumed. There was a smart wind and the flames had gained surprising headway. Peter Braddock dashed into the threatened and burning building for the horses, calling on volunteers to follow, which were supplied readily enough. Bob Likkum with Brad Simons excitedly ran for water buckets. The horses in safety, Uncle Peter joined the bucket brigade. The flames were licking up the dry outside wall of the barn to the eaves; and the surround-

ing barnyard, the farmhouse on the other side of the picket fence forming one side of the barnyard enclosure, the pump and the thousand and one minutia breaking the way to the fields around were shining clear in the ominous and sinister light. Back of it all, at a distance beyond, banking up in a dark mass, stood the woods fringing the margin of Lost River.

"Git a ladder over thare, quick," shouted Uncle Peter pointing to where, a little way off from the barn, one lay balanced across an unused and disabled hayrake in the barnyard.

Esau raced, fairly raced, for a fat boy, and got the ladder.

"Stick it up here," commanded Uncle Peter fiercely, indicating rapidly the point of vantage at which he thought the fire might be most effectively combated. "I'd like ter hev' ahol' o' who done this," hissed the old man between his set teeth. He sensed, at last, the full meaning of mother's expressive words about "Gipsy talk," and the possible relation of its late hostile employer Zeke Smithin to the present impending calamity.

The ladder was "stuck up" as directed by the energetic and determined farmer, and the women continued working with the men to supply sufficient water; men and women, under Bob Likkum's prompt, skilful and effective management, alike forming, as near as possible, a continuous and unbroken line along which to pass buckets from the pump to the fire.

The great, massive barn door had originally been swung by means of common, strong, iron hinges, the latter, in the course of time, much worn, and the one at the top of the door having recently become broken a stout leather hinge had taken its place. The flames had eaten away this leather substitute, and the huge blazing object which it had assisted in supporting was starting

to fall. De had taken a position in the rear of Parson Woods, in the bucket line, and behind her stood Brad Simons, the receptacles for water to extinguish the fast increasing conflagration progressing rapidly between them. Simons saw the big door swaying out as De, uttering a little cry and oblivious of her own risk, caught sight, near the barn doorway, of her pet lamb apparently stupefied by its position, and sprang forward to carry it beyond the reach of danger. Brad, with an exclamation of alarm and at great personal risk and hazard, swiftly covered the distance between himself and the unconscious rescuer and savior of the lamb just as she reached the incline ascending to the doorway of the burning building. The door was descending in flames and Brad had no time to drag the girl away; but stood courageously beneath the falling object. The fiery mass, it seemed to the man below, came down like lead. It taxed, under the critical and trying circumstances, even his own great strength and endurance to withstand the shock of physical impact drawing on the grim and unflinching resistance necessary to successfully encounter and endure the heat and flames. His hands were burned; his hair on fire. Parson Woods gave a shout and sprang to Simons' relief. It was all over in a moment; but De was sensible of the debt she owed her rescuer. It might have cost her dear had she been caught beneath the falling mass of heavy timbers. The incident, at the time, was passed over with little remark; but it left Brad Simons in a new light in the honest minded girl's estimation.

At last by great exertion the blaze was checked; the firelight flickered out low and fitfully over the surrounding scene, and the fire fighters were permitted to see their efforts crowned with fair success. The barn had sustained considerable damage, but was saved for

all practical purposes. The hay at the other side of the loft had escaped, or nothing could have preserved the farm structure from total destruction.

With the blazing building between him and the fire fighters, and outside the range of firelight, a man skulked in the obscurity and gloom of fence and bush, while he made his way to the trees along the river. The person of the insulter of John Braddock's wife, and the mortal enemy of Peter Braddock, Zeke Smithin, could have been recognized in the man thus stealing away.

The big Newfoundland dog suddenly barked loudly.

"Shet up," sharply commanded Uncle Peter, whose nerves had stood all they were going to.

De, nearby, patted the faithful animal on the head, which affectionate and friendly attention he acknowledged by a quick wag of the tail.

"Bu'st my time!" ejaculated Uncle Peter Braddock when, all danger over, he stood in the barnyard and mopped the perspiration from his face with his red bandana handkerchief, while the others were gathered about; "ef I thought, mother, that ye could be right 'bout that 'tarnal Zeke Smithin an' his red cock biz'ness meanin' he did this barn burnin',—" Uncle Peter paused; he seemed to find it difficult to speak,—"*John ought to kill him,*" burst from the old man's lips.

CHAPTER XVII.

ZEKE SMITHIN MEETS A VIOLENT END.

Zeke Smithin's unaccountable and seemingly untimely end came, with startling abruptness, upon Unele Peter Braddock's conscious words touching his son's feelings toward Smithin and prompted, at the conclusion of the fire, by the just indignation of the old Hoosier over the supposed attempt to destroy his barn.

Zeke, in his own purposeless and shiftless life, had been a gambler. At such times as his wayward fancy moved him, he would mount horse and ride aimlessly for days, "lookin'," as he put it, "fur luck." Just previous to his death, he had mounted his scrawny horse and sallied forth from T——, as usual to challenge fortune. His wanderings had wound up at a certain town in that locality; and there Zeke had broken a faro bank. Afterward, he had restridden his bony steed and, loaded with spoil, set forth upon his return to the town of T——. The circumstances attending Ezekiel's progress were so far clearly defined; but here the trail was lost. Like the renowned river in Southern Indiana, which flows in majestic self possession and picturesque beauty for miles, and then suddenly and mysteriously disappears to as unaccountably reappear, after miles of invisibility, so was the famous course of events in the murder of Zeke Smithin. After being plainly visible to the point of Zeke's departure with the possessions of the faro bank, its current incomprehensibly sank from view only to come once more to the surface after a fashion to be presently noted.

It was Saturday, at about the hour of noon. The town of T—— wore a prosperous air. Farm wagons in profusion surrounded the court house square, and stood with horses from long drives, hitched to the rails (common, at that time, in the public squares of rural towns) and drooping restfully in their gear.

Farmers in "store clothes," some in the garb in which they had left the fields, their butternut jeans thrust in their rusty boots, and broad flapping straw hats enveloping their faces, idled around upon neighboring corners, either preening their fine feathers or jangling the big brass spur upon the heel of the old, yellow, mud covered boot, or lazily switching random bootleg or varied object with riding whip or buggy lash. The busy hum of country talk, town gossip and politics was abroad. The stores were busy, too; while men from the neighboring farms took this day to gather around a social glass and swap prices in wheat, corn and cattle. It was a day of quite uncommon rural activity and bustle.

Passing in and out of the crowd; stopping to exchange a word with this one and that, and showing himself a familiar visitor to the town, went a powerful, heavy set man, short of stature, of colorless, smooth shaven face, and a square, iron like jaw. He had a manner of singular confidence, and he approached one group of talkers after another with the utmost ease and assurance. As he neared a little knot of men, who were discussing the politics of the country, the deference paid him by those present, and a certain air of fear of the man worn by all who addressed him, proclaimed his position to be one of importance and influence in the community. His keen, furtive glance kept roving from group to group, evidently searching for someone.

"No tellin' what that there feller hain't into, er

where 'e ben't about to ketch a feller in th' dark, any time," remarked a farmer, in a guarded and cautious voice, as the silent, square jawed, pale faced man went by. "He's got 'em all by th' short hair, fellers weth brains an' all, an' 'e never went to school more'n a day in 'is life, so he sez."

"Jason Jump, ye mean?" commented a second man.

"Ya-as," rejoined the first. "He's got the politics uv this here darn country, county an' deestriet spiked, an' on'y jus' kum tuh the State. Friend uv Brad's—Brad Simons. Carries the hull durn neighborhood aroun' in his pocket, and a heep o' other things same way, that ye don't want to talk about, reckon. Guess he makes a livin' out o' cattle raisin' 'ith Brad Simons—don't know."

"Wouldn't like to know much where he goes, up in the hills. 'Tain't healthy to know everything, I tell ye," discreetly observed the second speaker.

In the meantime, the subject of discussion and remark passed on up the street and placing a hand on the arm of Brad Simons, standing with Bob Likkum in front of the post office, drew him aside.

The man—Jason Jump, thus characteristically referred to by the farmer, talked long and earnestly with Simons. He appeared to offer views objectionable to Brad, as the latter was seen to shake his head, exclaiming,

"No, no."

"But," persisted Jump, "I say, yes. If I am going to lead those fellows, it must be my way. You know you get plenty out of it."

The point, to whatever matter it related, was adjusted quickly and satisfactorily to Jason Jump's idea of personal supremacy.

"Brad," then said Simons' companion, looking curi-

ously out of the corner of his eye at the cattleman's florid countenance, "you must have an A 1 house-keeper."

"Mona's all right," replied Brad, unsuspectingly.

"Yes," continued the other, "should say she was. Going to marry her?"

"What do you mean?" quickly exclaimed the other, his suspicions now aroused.

"Oh, nothing special," carelessly rejoined Jump. "That's a nice marriage agreement between you and her."

"You *were* in the bank robbery, then, Black Hank, were you, you damned thief?" cried Simons furiously, in the sudden realization of the possession, by his dangerous and unscrupulous associate, of that seriously compromising agreement between himself and his house-keeper; at a time, too, when the infatuated stockman felt himself falling deeper and deeper under the spell of De Braddock. The inconvenient document had been among the papers and bank deposit of Mona Walker, and which were stolen from the bank.

"You eternal fool!" hissed the companion of the enraged cattleman; "you call me that name, here, and I'll do *you* up."

"What's your game?" retorted Simons, a little more steadily.

Jump's own anger had been deeply aroused, and was yet burning fiercely in his piercing glance.

"You're trying to marry De Braddock, and ruin Mona Walker. I shall, certainly, not permit you to do the latter," the outlaw leader's voice was cold, in suppressed temper.

"Mr. Jump," observed the cattle trader, an icy calm taking the place of his previous rage, "it appears to me, that you are going somewhat deeply, maybe a

little too deeply, into the affairs of this community. I have been, likewise, privately informed, that your outlawry inspired young Bolers to his act of forgery."

It may be as well to say here, that there has been no intention of connecting Brad Simons with the actual membership of the criminal organization of which Jason Jump was the head. Simons was not a sworn member. However, by a profound cunning, he maintained a firm control of these unworthy members of society. He might be said to have occupied some such a position as that of "fence," to receive and handle stolen goods. He joined in none of the meetings of the odious order; and had never been other than a powerful and dangerous authority to submit and appeal to, on the outside.

"That for your information," retaliated the incensed and defiant robber, in response to Simons' last speech, at the same time snapping his fingers in Simons' face.

"Another little matter," still quietly went on the outlaw's secret and deadly associate, while a murderous look crept into his eyes. In repressed, even tones, and with ominous suspicion, he concluded: "The Smithin affair ought to keep you busy enough."

"What do you —?" Simons' companion, with a singular expression of concealed cunning, was abruptly and suddenly silent. Then, "Now, Simons, you're trying to marry De Braddock. How much is that marriage agreement worth?"

"I've a mind, you villain," ground out Simons between his teeth, with an additional oath, "to hand you and your d——d gang over to the law."

"Oh, no, you haven't," was the other man's cool rejoinder. "You might be handing yourself over, at the same time.—How much is it worth, Simons?"

"Not a ——— cent," said the cattleman, in a

tone of stifled wrath, and, turning on his heel, he walked away.

"Well," said Jump, "we'll see about that, later."

Near a popular saloon, there was assembled a small group of farmers, including the representative influence of the locality.

"Step right in, men!" called a cheery voice, "and prime up," and a well known local politician, who at the moment was passing, paused in his utterance of this address and looked smilingly at the gathering.

There was a ready response and a general entrance into the drinking place. While those assembled were partaking of the politically minded host's entertainment, there pushed excitedly into the barroom a man shouting,

"Zeke Smithin's bin killed—found weth his head bu'sted, on the road runnin' over past Samples's place."

Jason Jump, sauntering carelessly in, his usually cold, white, expressionless face, to the casual observer, twitching slightly, was a curious and interested listener.

"Don't allow!" said a farmer setting his glass down untasted on the bar, and gazing with open mouth at the bearer of these tidings.

"Huh?" exclaimed another holding his undrained glass at his lips, in an attitude of eloquent astonishment.

The politician alone appeared to retain his presence of mind. Having in tow the present goodly gathering of bulwarks of a free country, he raised his voice:

"Gentlemen, it is as I have long been telling you. The country is going to the dogs. Look at our laws—look—look—I say, gentlemen, look—" they were looking as hard as they could. The little gathering of men permitted its gaze to wheel slowly to the face of the speaker and continue to rest there. "I say, look at the

condition," burst forth the orator, as if, in an unhappy quagmire of political statesmanship, a happy inspiration had suddenly come to his relief,—“look at the condition in which the tyranny of our benighted land has left—our country roads, on which, in the full light of the glorious day of liberty, our most respected citizens” (news had preceded Zeke’s untimely end of Zeke’s possession of the funds of the faro bank) “are struck down, by the remorseless hand of power, in our midst, in the heyday of power and glory.”

How much longer the bewildered listeners had been held spellbound by these singular powers of political oratory will have to remain undetermined, for, at this moment, the entrance of Bob Likkum and Uncle Peter Braddock interrupted the efforts of the orator.

The politician, who had a surprising facility of variation, exclaimed, upon the arrival of Bob and Uncle Peter,

“Drink, gentlemen, drink of the nectar of the gods!”

“Whose necktie?” drawled Bob.

They all laughed.

The breathless messenger, who had brought the news of Smithin’s fate, and who had been struck dumb in the face of the politician’s surprising explanation of crime in general, and upon their country roads in particular, was here, by means of the contents of a bottle shoved across the bar, at last restored to powers of speech. He went on to treat his interested audience to the few facts attending the discovery of Zeke’s body, and many more details not facts, which his imagination, fired by the country whiskey, supplied the modern Ananias, on whom the benignant pictured features of the father of his country looked down in sadness, from the wall behind the bar.

There had insinuated himself into the throng col-

lected at the bar a character well known in the community for an entire absence of all habits of industry, unless the devotion of one's moments to the pleasures of pastime may, in dearth of other occupation, be regarded among the enterprises. This man, by name, Job Saunders, now spoke up.

"Wall, bu'st me," observed Saunders, "ef that ain't about it—seen a strange feller, yist'day, sneakin' 'long the fence by Samples's wood, w'en I b'en over there to the river, a-fishin'."

"What'd he look like?" inquired Bob Likkum.

"Slouchy kind uv a cuss," said Job.

"Get clost to him?" pursued Bob.

"By gum!" replied Job, who like all neglected humanity warmed up to unexpected notoriety; "was as clost as from me to you."

"Scar," said Bob,—"scar acrost his forehead, here?" and Bob suited the action to the word and drew the forefinger of his own right hand across his own forehead.

"By gum! now, gentlemen," again impressively ejaculated Job, "that's him—we've got him—hed the scar jest as you said he had."

"Got him—got who?" sharply and with original grammar asked the man who had indulged his hearers with the recent remarks on political science; but who, strange to say, was a lawyer of ability and of extended practice. "What do you mean?" this last to Bob Likkum,

"Why, ye see, Bob and me," quietly put in Uncle Peter Braddock, "we was a-goin' along this mornin', drivin' over here with mother and De, and seen a feller—"

"Seen a feller—" took up Likkum at this point.

"Jest—" said Uncle Peter.

"Like—" said Bob.

"What Job says—" continued Uncle Peter.

"The other feller was like," finished Bob.

"And our Esau," added Uncle Peter, as though it might be a useful piece of evidence on which to hang a man,—"'our Esau tol' me, 'at he driv' a man 'at had a scar on his furhead out'n our barn, where the gol darn tramp was sleepin', t'other day.'" Uncle Peter could not "abide" tramps.

The lawyer laughed. "Well, men," he said naturally enough, "convict a man on that! Scarcely as plain as a pikestaff. Hardly occasion to say, could scarcely hang a yellow dog on that evidence."

But pebbles make eddies, and Peter Braddock's remark dropped in the current of talk had its effect.

"All right," here spoke up one who, up to that time, had remained silent,—"'all right, but better git the feller, if possible,'" and the speaker, who was the sheriff of the county, took a well chewed piece of cigar from his mouth and spat in a quick, short way of decision.

Jason Jump, still watchful—still silent, stood a moment. Then, said:

"Yes."

"You're certainly correct about that, Zach," rejoined the lawyer to the sheriff, and the latter's moving to the door was the cue for a general departure of those gathered in the barroom.

Jason Jump sauntered out, with easy nonchalance.

When Uncle Peter Braddock left the drinking place he encountered Mrs. Braddock.

"Mother," said Uncle Peter, as Mother Braddock joined him, "'ye've heerd, I take it, of Zeke Smithin's end?'"

"Oh! Peter, ain't it dreadful (Mrs. Braddock pro-

nounced this word "drefful"). I don't know what this wicked world's a-comin' to, I don't."

"Yes, pore feller. Zeke's b'en a good sort, arter all," moralized Uncle Peter prone, after the manner of his kind, to find virtues in the dead denied the living,— "never did no harm to nobody, as I knows on." Peter generously forgave his own suspicions, and never knew definitely who set fire to the barn.

"Where are they all goin', in that crowd?" queried Martha as the neighbors of Uncle Peter, with whom the old man had just parted company, hurried, with unwonted commotion, down the street.

"They's a feller they be after, 'at they think, maybe, had somep'n to do with the killin' of Zeke," replied Mr. Braddock to his wife's question; "an' the sheriff an' the possey," Uncle Peter deemed it a fitting legal process to appoint the crowd, now rapidly swelling and moving away with the sheriff, a *posse comitatus*, and did so out of hand,—much pleased with himself Uncle Peter repeated,— "the sheriff and the possey is after the feller. They bin a-drinkin' some," added the farmer thoughtfully,— "hope they won't hurt the crittur."

At this moment the figure of Rachel Bolers, in the same sudden and unexpected manner in which it had appeared at the Braddock farm, started into view. It came seemingly from the rear of some idlers by the courthouse square, and advanced across the road in the direction of Farmer Braddock and his party. Mrs. Braddock was the first to catch sight of the specter like face and person of Nance's mother.

"Peter—Peter, let's be goin',—there's that gal Nan Bolers' mammy."

Despite these earnest beseechings from Mrs. Braddock, Peter Braddock stolidly held his ground.

"Pore thing," compassionately said the old man, gazing at the woman nearing them.

The face of Nance Bolers' mother, as the latter reached the edge of the walk on which the group from the Braddock farmstead stood, was lighted with the appearance of the wild disorder of a mind deranged; and, as usual, the demented creature caught, in her speech, at the controlling emotion and idea of the moment.

"They'll ketch him—Jack Ketch'll git 'im, an' they'll hang him—Jack Ketch'll hang 'im!" she cried, in an eerie monotone. "They'll ketch 'im, an' they'll hang 'im," repeated the woman, "and they'd orter, for he spiled my gal—my Nanny. I'll put the rope aroun' his neck, myself, I will," cried the woman, uncannily waving her arms. "I'm goin', now, to help 'em," and the seeming irresponsible wreck of past joys and sorrows flitted spectrally past Peter Braddock and on in the wake of the sheriff's party, tossing her arms on high with bent and bony fingers like a vulture or some other bird of prey or ill omen descending upon the feast of death.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LYNCHING SYNDICATE SHORT ON DIVIDENDS.

William White, twenty-five years of age, was the son of one Samuel White, who, like Peter Braddock in the case of De, had given William an education above the average advantages which the times rendered customary, or often possible, amongst farmers. White, born in Indiana, had graduated from the Asbury University, at Greencastle, in his native State. William White's father, William's sole surviving relative at the time, dying, had left the young writer a living, barely enough for one, in the rental of a small farm. The young man was talented; but, as is not unusually the case, little understood in the neighborhood where his earlier youth had been passed.

De's schooling had received the attention of a Miss Primvale who, at the little town of T——, accommodated a limited number of boarders.

Brad Simons was, likewise, noted for his "book l'arnin'." Like White, he had in early days made an advanced experiment with the University, at Greencastle; but the failure, prior to his own father's death, of his parent's financial ability to continue his son's educational course had prevented the young man's graduation; and a certain indifference to leaving the farm had left Brad Simons a grazier and a farmer; out of which conditions he had repaired the fallen parental fortunes and grown rich and prosperous, for his locality and day.

At this point, it is no matter of surprise, that, in the course of human events, De Braddock and William White should (unseen of Uncle Peter but seen of Mother Braddock) meet on the day of the death of Zeke Smithin, when Saturday buying had brought Peter Braddock's family to town.

Brad Simons encountered the lovers; and, as he joined William White and De on one of the streets of the country town,

"Miss De, I perceive is dallying with the Muse," he lightly remarked, with a secret sneer, which offered both unquestionable offense to White, and flippant slight to the girl.

"I believe," observed White, "the Muse deserted you, at an earlier period of your career." It was a fair thrust, and, in spite of himself, Brad colored. The cattle trader had pride in books; and, despite his easy going selfishness, at times experienced, as the passing of shadow upon water, a vain regret in his broken college career, which, however, he had never really cared or desired to renew.

White's rival, in further uttered speech, ignored his adversary's hit, although upon its reception he had winced palpably:

"Miss De," he contented himself with saying, "I have knowledge of some business in which your brother John is deeply concerned. I am sure it will prove of advantage for you to hear it," and Brad Simons, speaking, made a movement as if to join the walk of the lingering couple.

De Braddock hastily drew back from White, and simultaneously from Brad himself, and looked quickly and consciously into Simons' eyes peering into hers.

"I wish," returned she, "you would speak to my father."

It instantly flashed across White's mind, and with truth, that one, if not the only, object Brad Simons had was to separate De and himself. The writer, thus moved, pleasantly and conciliatingly though self assertively observed:

"Miss Braddock has requested you to see Mr. Braddock, Mr. Simons," White spoke boldly, a trifle self conscious in thus sharing De's duties of response, but, otherwise, facing Brad Simons with an air of perfect politeness and quiet, easy dignity.

"Who, may I ask," inquired Simons, with ill concealed contempt, "constitutes you the romantically heroic guardian of Miss Braddock's affairs?"

"Mr. White," here interjected De, instinctively taking her lover's part, "is my escort."

"As such," observed Mr. William White much refreshed and encouraged, and turning cheerfully to Brad Simons, "may I again refer you to her father?" and without more ado, and with no objection on the part of the young lady, the for once victorious writer took the girl of his heart by the arm and marched off.

Simons stood scowling and furious, watching the two move down the primitive street. His scowl deepened as his gaze, shifting from the girl, rested upon the triumphant figure of the man at her side.

"So, my young bantam," muttered the baffled man, "you're up to that game, are you—open fight, eh?" He ran his fingers over the close shut lips of his mouth, as if in thought, and his face grew darker. "I have cattle in my pastures, that I would not sooner knock in the head. I'll stop that little game of yours, if it costs me a life, and it won't be mine, either," pursued the menacing and evil soliloquizer; and, obeying an involuntary impulse, he started forward with an apparent intention of following the retreating couple; when, as if to facili-

tate William's unceremonious dismissal of Brad's inconvenient wooing, Parson Woods, at that moment, came up and joined Simons, and unconsciously held him in a discussion of the recent killing of Smithin, a topic, by this time, engrossing the attention of the entire population. During Parson Woods' grave and sober remarks, Brad saw William convey the girl surely and steadily beyond the range of vision.

The lovers were returning from a ramble through the woods. The scent of the forest was in their nostrils. The sounds of the woodland were about them. Birds chirped, fluttered and settled to glance upon the two as they passed slowly beneath airy perches. The squirrel stopped quick in his scuttle up the tree, scuttled short and abruptly stopped again within his length—looked innocently down, moved a little pace and waited for the man and maid to go on in their rapturous way through the dreamy old wood.

He paused now and then to cull a wild flower. White chirped to the squirrel. A redbird whistled joyously.

"De, I have never told you—"

"Oh, see, William, that bit of red in the bushes," and the redbird, surely filled with the glorious sense of the splendor of his dress, swept in glad display from the bush to the bough of a neighboring tree.

"Your—your father objects . . ."

He had never before spoken of his feeling for her, and she knew he was about to do so now. She was silent.

A faint shout was heard down the road, then another; and presently it grew upon their dim and enraptured senses that a crowd of angry and excited people was approaching on the highway, at the wood's edge not far off.

White's apprehensions, pointed by recent observation of the threatening aspect of the eager man hunters in town, took alarm.

"De," he said hastily, "wait here a moment," and detaining his companion by the arm, at the side of a large oak, he made as if to start for the road.

"What is it?" exclaimed the other catching a feeling of excitement from her undeclared lover's face, and placing a restraining hand upon his.

"They'll lynch that man—they've caught him," and White's grasp tightened on the girl's arm.

The voices, in the road, had become recognizable. Bob Likkum's loud, piercing tones were heard:

"Now, fellers, see here—no harmin' the crittur! Jes' wait—give the miz'ble skunk a fair trial."

Again, De's voice broke the silence of the two standing alone in the wood.

"William, what is it?"

"The man," answered White, with face tensely turned in the direction of the road, "they suspect of killing Zeke Smithin."

They stood and listened, and past the open wood began to dart the figures of the mob, following each other in rapid succession along the not distant highway.

First came the unearthly, witch like figure of Rachel Bolers dancing among those in the lead, her hair flying, her arms extended and the ghostly drapery of her garments streaming around her. Jason Jump followed, silently gliding in the midst of the rioters. Next, came Bob Likkum's tall, angular form striding by; then came more confused perceptions of a mixed and motley gathering of shouting figures and flourishing arms. At last, White was able to make out, for the briefest space, the form of a man half walking and half dragged along

the road by two custodians, one at either side, and assisted from the rear by the ever present and officious Job Saunders. The watchers in the wood could see that one of the two principal conductors of the prisoner was the sheriff; the other, the political lawyer, who, even at this crisis, had, once more, succumbed to the disease of politics, and, with his eye fixed upon future political preferment of his own, was vigorously haranguing the multitude upon the merits and safety of law and order, and the objectionable characteristics of any administration local, national, or Dahomian, that rendered possible this insecurity to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." It mattered little to the orator,—what real, simon pure orator cares,—whether any one heard him, or paid any attention to him, or not,—he heard himself—that was sufficient. And, so, the mob of excited, overwrought, in some cases whiskey inflamed, and in all cases vengeful and vindictive spirits dragged their victim on in the direction of town.

White had scarcely time to wonder whether or not the presence of the sheriff would make against violence, when the last of the straggling crowd of men, boys and even women and little children passed by his narrow field of vision; and he heard a new shout from the rear.

"He's got Zeke's hat and gun, an' he's a triflin cuss, and oughter be hanged,—take him out'n the sheriff's hands, boys," and, thus, in the way of a snowball that grows insensibly, was the threatening character of the mob finally reaching rounded fullness and perfection.

White sprang forward in an uncontrollable impulse; then stopped as suddenly.

"De," he exclaimed hurriedly, "can you find your father and mother? I must—"

"William," replied the girl, "I am going with you."

“But, De—”

“I am going with you.”

The man and the girl sprang forward as if by a common impulse, and reached the fence in front of them almost before the sound of their voices had ceased to vibrate in the forest air.

They saw the frenzied crowd, with Rachel Bolers' uncanny figure leading on ahead, dragging the captive in its midst, hooting in the road above. One man, more active than the rest, had shot past the others, gone swiftly into a neighboring place, and, returning with a rope, was crying the fatal meaning of the article in loud and deadly tones.

White did not pause. Assisting his companion over the fence, the writer followed, when the two set out to overtake the mob. As they reached the straggling outskirts of the throng, the man with the rope pushed his way through the crowd and grasped the prisoner by the throat.

In the latter, White recognized, with a start, the tramp deserter from the outlaws, and his own scout.

It was noticeable that the captive, ragged and dirty as of a certainty was his appearance, bore himself with unmoved indifference and composure in the hands of his formidable captors. His hat was off, his hair flying, his face pale beneath the grime upon it, while the great ragged scar on the forehead had grown livid under the increased pallor of the skin, but he showed no signs of craven fear.

To add to the increasing confusion which an attempt to put a rope around the prisoner's neck had infused into the gathering, Rachel Bolers, wildly throwing her arms above her head and circling like a bat among the crowd, shrilly cried,

“Jack Ketch 'll ketch 'im, an' Jack Ketch 'll hang

'im. Put a rope aroun' his neck, hang 'im; put a rope aroun' his neck."

The sheriff promptly interfered, and spiritedly, if unwisely, knocked the rope bearer down, as the latter, fired by Rachel's wild and incoherent words, attempted to do her insane bidding.

Instantly, and with equal despatch, someone knocked the sheriff senseless, with the exclamation:

"Ye hit my brother, did ye!" and the politician-lawyer and Parson Woods, the latter of whom had come out from town in a vain attempt to side with law in the person of the sheriff, were hustled beyond the limits of the fighting mass. The insensible sheriff was quickly carried by his friends into an adjacent farmhouse, where efforts were made to restore him to consciousness.

These last events only increased the serious dangers which threatened the prisoner, and the timely arrival of William White, whose voice was heard clear and clarion toned above the din, arrested for a moment the perilous crisis.

"Look you, all," called White, and the lawyer and parson made their way to the side of the aroused scribe, "we are not going to stand by and see this thing done—don't think it."

"He had pore Zeke Smithin's gun an' hat," yelled a man.

"I don't care," shouted White, "what he had—you must take him to jail."

"We'll do ez we darn please," retorted a belligerent, who, like a true descendant of '76, though in a highly inflamed state of alcoholic independence, was resolved to repudiate the restriction of his liberty, on the part of anyone.

"Well, we'll see," cried White furiously, in his de-

termination, and De Braddock looked at her lover, with quick inspiration.

Bob Likkum, who had worked around to where the lawyer, William White and Parson Woods stood in a manner protecting De standing in the rear, said in a quiet tone to White,

"Be keerful, Billy, don't rile 'em more'n ye kin he'p,—thet thar' cussed Job Sa'nders 's bin a-workin' of 'em up. 'Pears like that 'air feller," observed the philosophic Bob, viewing the mob before him with a cool and watchful eye the while, "'u'd ruther be in mischief an' idleness, 'an eat. Look out!" cried Likkum, grasping White's arm, and thus effectually restraining a sudden movement of the writer to rush in among the excited and would-be lynchers; "don't git into no onnecessary trouble,—on'y make matters wus',—they's half uv 'em putt' nigh corned weth Wabash whiskey," and Bob Likkum, by superior strength, dragged White back from dashing madly into the murderous crowd.

Jason Jump, in the throng, looked on, still silently.

"They've got the rope around his neck," exclaimed White.

"See here, ye pesky varmints," shouted Likkum, attempting to elbow his way through to the man with the rope, but to no avail, for Bob was forced back, and, breathing hard, was ranged again at the side of the few friends of law and order.

At one side of the road, was the broad, low stump of a tree where, in some day of previous road making a large oak had been felled. Suddenly, without warning, the wild and unruly gathering, as if by a common instinct, swayed to the roadside, with the evident intention of penetrating the wood and using the limb of a forest tree for final and fatal conclusions. As the movement began, De, with the daring purpose of addressing the

mad swarm, sprang to the oak stump. The mob faced the impromptu speaker stand as she, unnoticed by White or the others, made for the woodland platform.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Bob Likkum, oblivious with the rest, of De's actions, and absorbed in his contemplation of the odds against them; "a hundred to three on us."

De had gained the stump. Springing lightly to the top of it she raised her clear, young voice above the distracted din, and instant silence fell. 'Tis thus the natural orator, sure of the audience, grasps its feelings, and, with no doubt or fear of results, bows and bends and sways it to the will. Nor may it be a cause of wonder, with the finished speaker, who brings long years of experience and patient labor to the task of understanding human nature and its varied emotions, together with the springs which actuate all human conduct,—it is not surprising that such a one might hold the interested hearers in a grip of steel; but in the case of a girl, young, not twenty, just from school, with nothing but a sense of unerring right to sustain her, it was little short of marvelous—miraculous, that the mad lynchers struck attitudes of frozen, rigid attention in the very tracks in which De's ringing voice had found them.

She could not have explained how the words came to her, but come they did—sweeping on, making resonant music by the wood, as of some forest cascade of glancing, purest waters. Plunging fearlessly over impediments, carrying all before it, came the flood of her heart's first born address to cool and quiet her maddened hearers, there.

"You! You men—you, who have hearts for home; you, who love mother, father, your wives and children; you, who may need justice, yourselves, some day; you, that want to send this man," and her finger pointed

unflinchingly at the captive, who, dust covered, blood stained from the rough handling of the mob and gazing in a species of wondering trance at the inspired countenance of the girl in front of him, stood with the throng forming his captors,—‘that would send this man to—hell,’ said De bravely and unflinchingly, “‘where you that do it, be sure, will follow,—you,—you, stay.’” She had not only their attention by this time, but their interest, as well. “‘There are those here who can decide the justice of this man’s case better than we,’” she continued with her finger still extended unwaveringly in the direction of the prisoner, while she began to experience a strange, exhilarating sense of exultant joy in the power that held the mob in check. “‘Let those, whose business it is, have him. Mr. White, Mr. Griscomb,’” referring to the lawyer-politician, “‘Mr. Likkum, Parson Woods, and the sheriff, who has been cruelly struck down in exercising his right to the man—they are the cool and proper ones. Hold!’” cried De, with upraised hand, as she perceived an impatient unrest in the crowd.

At this moment, the restored sheriff determinedly and courageously made his way to her side.

She had won; the intention of reckless and disordered lawlessness had been arrested—broken; the mob, after a few politic words from the sheriff, quietly dispersed,—separated, melted imperceptibly away,—its passions as quickly subsiding as they had arisen, and with it as silently and mysteriously vanished Jason Jump.

CHAPTER XIX.

BRAD SIMONS IGNOMINIOUSLY COMES TO GRIEF, WHERE
SOME MIGHT THINK HE BELONGS.

Ann Mariah Saunders, neat and prim, was waiting. It was Saturday. Bob Likkum might be expected to ride by any minute from his accustomed weekly visit to the town of T——. On this particular afternoon, for some unaccountable reason, Bob's arrival was belated. Ann glanced at the clock, in her scrupulously clean "settin' room." The hour was half past three—a half hour past the time at which, for seven happy years, these two had met in Bob's passing, and silently plighted their as yet unspoken faith—for seven more happy years were they ready to do the same! But what could it mean? Like the veiled Moorish woman, she had shrunk from exposure, and waited through the years, in the cloister of her retirement. Now, however, it was too much; and Ann rose restlessly from her chair, and went to the door. As the Ann of story, who once watched for her knight, she gazed wistfully adown the road for her love. There, at the door, the watcher drew a quick, happy sigh of relief, for here he came for whom she watched. Sir Robert Likkum, astride of his roan, rode up to the house.

Hitching his horse to the fence, Likkum, as though some mutual understanding could be expected to exist between himself and Ann relating to his slight delay in arrival, said, as he tugged at the end of the hitch strap after tying the knot,

"Heerd about it, did ye?"

"Bob, what on earth do you mean? I ain't heard anything,—what?"

"W'y, now, you don't say! About tryin'—them fellers a-tryin' to lynch the man—but," broke off Bob, suddenly, "don't reckon you heerd 'bout Zeke Smithin gittin' killed, either, then?"

"No. Oh! Robert, was pore Zeke Smithin killed?" exclaimed Ann Mariah.

"Shore an' certain," replied Bob who, by this time, had completed to his satisfaction the knot that tied his horse to the fence, and who removed his hat and wiped his perspiring brow.

"Oh! Robert, do tell me,—how—how did it happen?" ejaculated Ann Mariah with startled little cries.

Bob Likkum recounted what had, that day, transpired concerning the death of Zeke Smithin.

"And," wound up Bob comfortably, "they fin'ly got the feller tuh jail."

It was here deemed only proper by Ann to invite Robert into the house, which she did; and, once more, was as the Moorish lady of the veil. She, thereupon, following the usual feminine method, seated Bob and herself, took her sewing, and became mysteriously remote.

"Well, now, jes' you look," exclaimed Bob Likkum, admiringly, "at that there sowin' o' yourn! 's white an delicate ez snow."

"Think it's pretty, do ye?" observed the needle-woman, with a shade of coquetry.

"Jes' like yer own spotless life," replied Likkum, who was equal, in his own way, to the very best things William White ever wrote. "I say, Ann Mariah," and Bob cleared his throat; the object of his address trembled—it had the sound of "something coming;"

"ye see, we—you and me—have know'd each other, now, quite a spell."

"Yes, Robert," said the simple hearted woman, "I was just thinkin', yisti'day—"

"Of all sad words of tongue or pen,

The saddest are these: 'It might have been!'"

The lines of the poet Whittier supply the words of the present author, and do not convey the speech of Ann Mariah. At this moment, Parson Woods stopped his sorrel at the Saunders' gate. Ann had listened to the approaching hoofbeats for some seconds; and, with a sigh that would have been impatient in another, but in her was only resigned, she rose and went to the door.

"Good day," called the parson, cheerily. "How's times with you?"

"Nicely, parson, nicely, thankee," rejoined Ann Mariah who, by this time, had smoothed out all traces of displeasure from her placid and contented face,—"'be ye going to 'light (alight)?"

The parson, today, was riding horseback,—the "shay" was having a rest, and offering no further temptation to highwaymen and footpads.

"Think I shall," said the minister; and, after tying the sorrel alongside of Bob's saddle horse, followed Ann Mariah into the house.

"Robert, I certainly ought to encourage your goings-on," said Parson Woods, with agreeable though, perhaps, rather daring insinuation coming from a professional minister, as he spied Bob Likkum sitting in graceful abandon on the sofa; while the blushing Ann Mariah stood, with her back to the two men, busying herself with her face bent over her work basket on the table,—"'just in my line," with good natured joviality

continued the speaker. "Bob, you must make it a mighty good fee, in such an attractive case."

"Law! parson, how you do talk," cried Ann, not really displeased at this from the preacher, but whose blushes were certainly in no way diminished by the pleasantly and genially aimed speech of their beloved and implicitly trusted pastor. Likkum continued to gaze upon the premises with most becoming and self possessed unconcern.

Ann hospitably bustled about, with an additional and quiet alacrity; placed a welcome chair for their visitor, and employed herself in the making of the minister comfortable and at home; and they were all soon very cozy and at their ease.

"Most wonderful thing I ever heard of, about De Braddock stopping that mob," continued the parson, sociably extending the conversation. "Did you ever hear the like!" said he, his memory glowing with the recollection of De's act. The minister, together with every other man and every woman and child in the town hard by, whence he had just ridden, had been fired with the knowledge, while sharing with many the actual sight, of the girl's extraordinary behavior. "That girl," pursued the preacher enthusiastically, "could preach the gospel to the heathen."

"Reckon that's about right, parson," said Likkum.

"*I* should have died," said Ann Mariah.

"Reckon few women would have been equal to it," assented the minister. "Did you hear, Robert, about Tom before you left town, to-day?" inquired Parson Woods.

"Tom—who, parson?" queried Bob.

"John Braddock's paid off a note to Brad Simons; and it's leaked out that it's that note's what Simons has been holding against Tom Bolers and John Braddock.

Someone got it down to town, that Bolers, not long ago, forged Brad Simons' name, and, in order to keep Brad from sending Tom—you know John stands by his wife's brother, and you can't blame him for it,—in order to keep Brad from sending Tom to the penitentiary, John gave his note to Brad Simons for the sum which Tom got on the forgery."

"So Brad won't prosycute, eh?" said Likkum, getting a little more out of his lazy position and sitting somewhat straighter on the sofa.

"Seems not," returned the minister.

"Wuz that all John Braddock promised, ef Brad Simons 'u'd let up on Tom Bolers?" questioned Likkum.

"Didn't hear anything else," replied the parson.

"I suppose," continued Bob, "ye knows that 'air Brad is pow'rful sweet on John's sister De?"

"Why, no, Likkum, I can't say that I do," was the parson's interested rejoinder.

"Well, he is, an' that's the milk in the cokynut," concluded Bob emphatically.

"Parson," observed Ann Mariah in this suggestive connection, "will you and Robert have a glass of butter-milk?"

The offer was accepted.

"You think John—?" began the pastor inquiringly, when Ann Mariah's shrewd swain interrupted him.

"Don't think John uz conshus uv anything; but that 'air Brad Simons 'u'd let Tom off to git 'em all under obligashuns to 'im, fur his own selfish eends. Brad, I sez, ain't ther man ter he'p anyone without a pow'rfuller motive 'an love uv naybor, consarn him! beggin' yer pardon, parson," said Bob Likkum.

"You think, then," observed Parson Woods, "that Simons is meaning to hold this forgery over De through her affection for John?"

"Don't think," replied Bob intuitively—"I *know*."

"Well, laws me!" ejaculated Ann Mariah darting to the door, "here, I do 'low," she went on in tones of pleased surprise and hospitality, "'s Missis Braddock, an' De, and Uncle Peter," and, in fact, nearing the gate, as Ann reached the door, was visible a big red farm wagon (Uncle Peter had not yet grown fashionable to the extent of a surrey), with De, radiant after her singular triumph over the mob, sitting by the side of Mother Braddock on the rear seat. Uncle Peter was driving, with the fat farmboy Esau on the seat in front,—Uncle Peter, on all occasions when present, invariably and dogmatically insisting on, himself, performing the function of a driver, evidencing a characteristic obstinacy which veined his entire nature with great satisfaction to himself.

"Howdee, Missis Braddock," called Ann, cordially, from the door,—“howdee, Uncle Peter,—howdee, De. Hitch—come right in, won't ye? Awful hot,—glass o' cool buttermilk er, maybe, Uncle Peter'd like a glass uv cider?" Ann Mariah, having reached this conclusion to her simple address of hospitality and welcome, waited, with sunny confidence, the results.

Uncle Peter cried,

"Whoa," opposite the gate.

And Mother Braddock exclaimed,

"I do declare!"

And De said, smilingly,

"Ann Mariah, if you can give me a drink of water—"

When Ann, now bent upon entertaining man, woman, beast or child of the neighborhood, interrupted with,

"Git right out,—right out," and that settled it.

The team was hitched, with Parson Woods' and Bob Likkum's riding horses for company, and Mother Brad-

dock and De and Uncle Peter, not forgetting Esau, the fat farmboy, all entered the cool and refreshing haven of Miss Saunders' pretty, vine-covered cottage.

Heat and thirst allayed,

"Mother Braddock," said Parson Woods, his straightforward nature rebelling at what he had just heard from Likkum of the possibility of Simons' selfish dealings respecting the winning of De, "we have heard of the fortunate conclusion of the affair of John's interest in—" the parson hesitated. He believed, however, in as little secrecy as went with decency and proceeded, "We have heard of the happiness of John in settling—"

"Parson, I guess you're right—no use makin' a pesky skeleton in the closet of the matter," interrupted Uncle Peter deliberately; "an' so I tells mother, an' thanks you hearty."

"I wanted to tell you both, Uncle Peter, said the pastor, "that we are glad everything is happily settled relating to Tom Bolers."

"No one is gladder than I am," said Brad Simons, who had reached the door unperceived, and who had heard enough to divine the subject of the conversation that had just transpired.

The cattleman, following the payment that day, by John Braddock, of the latter's note in the Bolers' affair, had given further scheming and resolute consideration to his own designs on De Braddock. Like all selfish and unscrupulous persons, Brad Simons was not disposed to abandon an object on which he had set his heart. The more he reflected, as he rode up from town on this day, the more, inflamed to such a pitch had grown his passions, did he fall into a craze of longing for the beautiful country girl. So that, when, perceiving Uncle Peter's wagon hitched at Ann Mariah's door, he reached the

Saunders' cottage, his determination to obtain his desires had become as a fate.

The note had been taken up before the date of its maturity; and something told the cattleman that there was an element of unusual irregularity about this sudden and unlooked for satisfaction of his financial demands upon John Braddock. What was that element? Had not John Braddock threatened to kill Zeke Smith-in? Zeke was known to have won at play. And permitting a flow of recollection relating to the recent tragedy to tinge the atmosphere of his unhealthy mental views, Simons had reached the doorway at the climax of Parson Woods' humane speech.

Gazing watchfully and intently about him, Brad, without waiting for an invitation, entered the room where sat the assembled guests of Ann Mariah Saunders.

"Parson Woods," said the Hoosier grazier as he entered, and smiling genially on those present, "I am delighted to hear you expressing sentiments that do you honor. Now that poor Tom Boler's misfortune has become community property," Simons himself had cunningly set the tale afloat when, payment of the note having been made, he saw he could gain more by the community's knowledge of his previous forbearance,— "now," continued Brad, "that the matter has become community property, I don't mind saying the money, which only pressing necessity made me accept from John," (this sounded plausible), "has been paid, and there is no harm done. Ann Mariah, I'm sure that buttermilk is good," smoothly continued the ready plotter pointing to a plain, old fashioned glass pitcher, through the transparent and gleaming sides of which the generous beverage in question could be seen.

Ann Mariah, who cordially disliked Brad Simons,

was left here no alternative but to press upon his acceptance a draught of the refreshment at hand.

Bob Likkum had been eying the late arrival with no great favor. Now, at this turn of events, he quietly drawled,

“Putty weak fur your tippie, ain’t it, Brad?”

Bob was a personage, one of the few objects, indeed, that Brad Simons really feared. The direct truth and human fairness of the man always set Simons’ teeth on edge. He made no reply to Likkum’s sally, deeming, in an encounter with the famous Wabash humorist, discretion to be the better part of valor.

Brad quaffed his buttermilk composedly enough; and, De slipping out of the house to pluck a nosegay from Ann Maria’s gardens, he waited a moment for Parson Woods to launch one of his mild persuasions against the evils of intemperance; when Likkum, whose own fad was the subject of “a wholesome moderation,” becoming absorbed in the parson’s remarks, Simons glided out among the flower beds in pursuit of the sister of John Braddock.

“Miss Braddock,” said the farmer-grazier as he joined the young girl, “trying to gild the lily? Floral or other decoration hardly increases such loveliness as yours,” the man’s hot glance was full on her face.

While De Braddock was advised, through recent happenings, that circumstances pointed to a release of John from all obligations to Brad Simons, yet there was something indefinable in the situation that seemed to render it impossible for her to break the spell of an unpleasant interview, and seek her preference in the house with her father and mother. Perhaps it was only an instinct, on her part, to treat the speaker with courtesy that kept her there. She, likewise, remembered his act in rescuing her at the fire. So, now, she merely smiled

as she continued to cull her nosegay, and her smile was of that non-committal kind that guarded the operator from too open or direct further attack of the objectionable masculine overtures.

"De," said Brad Simons advancing close to the girl's side, and touching with the tips of his burning fingers her trembling hand, which she instantly withdrew, "do you know, to me, you are the most beautiful—"

"I have told you it was useless for you to address me this way," said De firmly.

"But you *must* hear me," urged Brad.

"I cannot," repeated the girl determinedly.

"You shall," said Simons brutally, forgetting himself.

"Mr. Simons," replied the object of his address, fixing upon the displeasing countenance bending over her a steady look from her large, clear, brown eyes, "you will oblige me by stepping out of my way," all thought of everything but repugnance asserting itself.

The two stood for a moment, each with eyes trying to control the other's will, when De's strong, innocent young gaze proved the superior, and Simons, breathing a little more quickly than usual, moved, as if by an involuntary impulse, to the side of the path.

"Thank you," said the girl simply, and passed on.

"Do you know," asked Brad Simons in a low tone of unmistakably evil insinuation, as his companion made evident purpose to proceed at once to the house, "where your brother got the money to pay me?" It was a chance thrust of the man, and wrung from him in desperation as he saw, in her determined repudiation of him, a prospect of final defeat. It touched her with no doubt of the honesty of her brother's methods in obtaining the price of release from the consideration of Simons; but, again, and this time no politeness infused

any element into the position of affairs, she was instinctively halted in her footsteps. The restraint placed upon her progress by the man's tone had, with other things, certainly implied a threat from that man to her. This alone may, at first, have operated to cause her to pause; but there was something else which caused her to hesitate; and Simons found out what it was to outrage or attempt to outrage the feelings of a sister loving as tenderly as she did the absent and insulted brother. The double implication in Simons' question, though unexplained, was as a flash of lightning conveyed to her, and like an explosion, when a lighted fuse is at the powder magazine, was the quick response.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed, wheeling on him.

Simons could not have uttered his thoughts—his meaning—had his life depended upon an answer in detail.

He knew John Braddock had threatened to kill Zeke Smithin. He knew Zeke had been killed. And he knew Smithin was supposed to have had money on his person when death arrived. He knew the money was missing from the body of the dead man, when the solemn end of the gambler was first discovered,—this was what he had to prompt the unfeeling blow he had dealt his victim. Even had he known more, it is possible that the fierce unflinching courage and scorn in the girl's face, which increased and overwhelmed him to the last, had, at the final moment, sent him abashed and overthrown from her presence, for her look withered him and grew and continued to burn and blast his soul. He knew, at that moment, nothing save his own distorted suspicions, and stood doubly silenced before the offended goddess.

"You would cast some suspicion on my brother John,

and threaten me, at the same time!" blazed De Braddock.

Brad, who had not been present at the attempted lynching, and whose belief in the part taken in it by De—a belief based upon a doubt of woman's sufficiency of courage in general—had been of a somewhat weak and skeptical nature, now learned what was the spirit, force and power in the girl that had quelled the mob. He could not remove his gaze from those flaming eyes, or then and there he would have laid down his case and willingly taken to his waiting horse and ridden away—ridden away to his cattle and books, and, mayhap, who knows? to the ultimate wedded proprietorship of Mona, the pretty housekeeper. His lips grew dry, and he found himself trying to moisten them with his parched tongue. He smiled a sickly half smile of weak apprehension.

"You,—you,—why, you coward!" cried the justly incensed girl, white and red by turns. "You,—why, you,—shall I call the men?" said she, abruptly breaking off in her scathing denunciation. "Men! what for?—not to encounter a man, for you're not one. Why, Brad Simons, you're not worthy to be in the same world with my brother John, or—with me," she added with a quick perception of the most effective application of the last whistling cut of the rawhide in her words.

Brad involuntarily threw up his hands in front of his face, and bent his head, as if warding off a veritable lash from a real whip. He was pale and trembling, and an oozy, clammy moisture was breaking out on face and body.

"Get out of the yard, before I set the dog on you," and, as though anticipating the need of his services, a low growl was heard at the rear of the furious girl, where, unnoticed, the Braddock Newfoundland, that invariably followed the family to town and home again,

had crept, and was undeniably prepared to protect his mistress. "Go," said the girl, authoritatively, to the humiliated and defeated man, in a tone which brooked no refusal; and Brad Simons turned, with a muttered imprecation; left the yard; mounted his horse, and rode away.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HAUNTED WOOD.

A woman, mowing and mumbling over a fire of dried twigs and withered leaves, sat upon the greensward in a sequestered glen among the trees growing thickly about her. The twilight had just expired leaving its last crimson trace upon the west. The shadows in the wood deepened beneath the flickering firelight. The woman was alone. Ever and anon she thrust back from her wild, deep lined face the long hair hanging in loose strings about her ears. Her skin had become blackened and tanned by constant exposure to the elements, and her eyes burned with a hollow fierceness, gleaming, in the firelight, like those of some wild animal. As she threw back her hair with a querulous, impatient twitching of the gnarled, bony fingers, she would glance swiftly and covertly at the outlying gloom showing beyond the line of light cast by the fire and confusing the surrounding forest in a mass of blurred shadow. She moved restlessly.

“Alone,—all alone,” she muttered. “But I’ll bring the spirits—the brave, bold spirits,—yes, I will. *They’ll* talk to me.—

O where are the hearts of yestere’en,
And th’ loves of long ago?
The grass on their graves is bonny green,
And the shadows come and go,”

crooned the female, a gleam of wild and fitful sadness in her sunken eyes,

“An’ th’ shadows come and go.

I’ll raise the spirits,” she wildly repeated.

The sybil-crone, spectral, unearthly, rose gradually to her feet, at the same time waving her thin and emaciated hands fantastically over the fire. Her right hand sought a light wooden staff resting upon the ground at her side, and, now quite erect, she passed it, with a peculiar, ghostly motion, through the air above the blaze. Her gaze became fixed, as in a kind of rapt trance, upon the point in space which her wand had just feverishly traversed. She stood toweringly upright, uttering some kind of supernal, unearthly incantations, and the rod she still held within her grasp sank slowly to her side and rested its one end upon the ground while, at the other, was her hand clasped closely about it. The long, thin, bony claw like finger of the left hand, with her arm outstretched, pointed at the empty atmosphere, as she spoke in wild, strange accents, invoking the spirits of the air:

“Spirits evil, spirits fair,—

Those that tell us what we are,—

Those that warn and those that rail,

Tell they best and worst, or fail!”

The smoke from the forest fire mingled slowly with the air about the uncanny female, and, as she swayed in a sort of weird, rhythmic motion, from side to side, a grotesque form appeared to come over the vapors rising out of the flames.

“Ha! ha!” she laughed sharply and shrilly; “they come—they come.”

“What say you?” she cried, after a pause. “I hear

ye. Whut is't? Aye, aye. Go on. Go on. I allus thought so. Ye whisper warnin's 'bout Brad Simons, an' pretty De, an'," the strange mad creature paused, with a look of real and startled understanding in her seamed and rugged face,—“what's that?” she breathed in a subdued, awe filled voice. “Ye say,—ha! Hank?—Yes, yes, whut uv him? ‘Beware De Braddock, er—’ well, well, well?—” she screamed impatiently, but the chain of connections, which had held thus far the impassioned and frenzied invoker of the immaterial world, had snapped. She sank exhausted, by the fire. After a bit, she looked wearily around.

“What keeps 'em so long, I wonder. I guess I'm crazy,” said the poor thing, passing her hand uncertainly and pitifully over her worn face. “I know, at times, I have something 'at sets my head a-goin' like 's if 'twuz on wheels. But, I reckon, they's other times I knows ez much ez anyone. I wish them times 'u'd stay longer, an' I could tell 'em all whut I knows. Folks kin look out w'en them times comes ter stay.” The forlorn creature nodded her head many times over the fire, and placed a supply of fuel on the flames.

“Here, ye ol' rip,” said a rough voice suddenly, behind her, “what you puttin' a spell on now, huh?”

The woman started violently. She turned with a swift motion on the newcomer.

“Much a brute ez ever, Hank, ben't ye?” retorted she, pushing back her hair and gazing intently and piercingly up into the black-bearded face above her. “I ain't allus crazy—wisht I wuz. Then I wouldn't go wild a-thinkin'—a thinkin'——”

“A-thinkin' whut charmin' kumpny I be? Ha! ha! —is that it?” laughed Hank.

“I dunno—I dunno,” muttered the woman; “I dun-

no whut 'tis, I'm sure . . . Is them di'munds in yer hair, Hank?" she inquired with placid abruptness.

Beneath their coarser air there had appeared a touch of affection; and now the man, patting the other gently on the head, said humoringly,

"Never mind about the di'munds, mother. I kin help ye get even with Brad Simons, though."

"Kin ye bring justice on him—kin ye? Kin ye bring Brad Simons to justice?" exclaimed Rachel Bolers aroused to a sudden uncontrollable fierceness of manner.

"De Braddock—" began her companion, when Rachel broke out in unfeigned alarm,

"De Braddock—De Braddock!" she screamed, her highly wrought and inflamed faculties seizing upon the results of her recent wild incantations;—"leave 'er be, Hank; leave 'er be. She'll be yer death. Leave 'er be."

"Ye crazy vixen, what d'ye mean?" ejaculated Hank.

"The fates reads yer doom in the daughter uv ol' Peter Braddock," cried the woman. "The spirits says ye'll die."

"Then, I'll come back and ha'nt ye," retorted the robber, with grim humor.

"Don't say it—don't say it—the fates reads it—the fates reads yer doom."

"They do, do they?" grinned the outlaw.

"Ye remember, hereafter, whut I tells ye," eagerly and earnestly implored the overwrought hag.

"Yes, I'll remember," rejoined Black Hank, sardonically. "I'll, same time, remember th' moon's made uv green cheese. I jes' heerd, terday," continued he meaningly, at the same time narrowly watching his companion's pitifully beseeching countenance, "that Brad Simons wants to *marry* De Braddock."

"I'll help ye kill him fu'st," shrieked the frantic

woman. "He's a villain who lies and deceives helpless wimen, that's what he is."

"Humph!" grunted Black Hank in his beard; "reckon thet's about it. Rachel, did Brad Simons wrong your daughter Nance?" queried the outlaw, sternly.

The suspicious creature looked up cunningly, in the manner of the deranged.

"I'll tell ye, ef ye kin makes justice law and law justice."

"I hed 'em fetch yer things frum yer gal Nance. Put 'em down," added the robber leader, turning to one of the band who, at that moment, came into the glade carrying a goodly-sized bundle over his shoulder. "Nance 'magines yer very comfortable at ther nayber's, where ye leads her to think ye stay most uv the time," said Black Hank, returning his attention to Rachel.

"Don't ye say nothin' 'bout my da'ter Nance," flashed out the other. "Don't ye do it. She's a good gal, no matter what folks say, tho' I do give her heaps o' trouble."

"I ain't sayin' nothin' 'g'in' yer gal, ye ongrateful animal. Nex' time, I'll leave yer ol' traps where I found 'em."

"Hank, dearie, I didn't mean nothin'. No, I didn't. Ye're reel kind," said the woman penitently, "and I'm much obleeged to ye."

Accepting the earnest expression of these tokens of appreciation with a gracious growl, the outlaw chieftain and his confederate, the late arrival, withdrew for counsel, seating themselves upon the ground a short distance from the fire.

"I've got it in the box. It was among ther things on deposit, when we cracked the bank. We kin make Brad Simons pay heavy fur it, ef he tries ter cut up his tricks marryin' De Braddock; and I think I kin make it still

heavier weth what Rachel Bolers 's got in her crazy, knowin' ol' head." Black Hank was speaking, where the two outlaws were conferring earnestly in low tones, and to all appearances unnoticed by Rachel.

But the stooped figure over the fire had overheard.

"So," she muttered, "they got it outhen the bank, what'll help git even with Brad. It's in the box, is it—it's in the box!"

Of a sudden, Rachel straightened her bent form, and, extending her arm and long ghostly finger, cried, "Look!"

"What is it ye see, ye crittur, can't ye ever tell?" growled the chief, giving, in his knowledge of the waywardness of the woman's fanciful moods, but a slight passing scrutiny in the direction in which she had pointed. Black Hank's inattention appeared justified. Nothing was visible seeming to call for such forcible notice.

"They think, in the country 'round, 'at the woods is ha'nted. They think I kin put ha'nts and spells on 'em. They know I come here, an' they keep away. They think the woods is ha'nted," crooned the possessed female.

There was a stir somewhere in a thicket bordering the glen.

"I see things," intoned the woman; "I see 'em.

There was another stir in the thicket.

"They're alive with 'em,—the trees an' flowers an' all the little bushes are kivered with 'em, an' they're a-dancin' in the moonlight."

A pair of eyes peered from out the thicket.

"Oh, say," cried the outlaw leader, "shut up, cain't ye?"

"There they 'air,—the fairies, elves an' pixies, an' th' wee brownies."

Black Hank, of an eminently practical turn of mind,

rumpled his heavy shock of black hair with a gesture of hopelessness, and gave up in despair.

"The moonlight—the moonlight!" cried Rachel. "Thar' 's the spirit uv justice, in the moonlight."

"What's that?" abruptly exclaimed the outlaw chief, looking around with a start. "Shucks! guess it's a wild-cat stirrin'. They see one, yisterday. Hen," went on the leader with darkling suspicion, and addressing his male companion in vice, "I'd like to know whutever bekum uv thet thar' tramp, that time, 'at j'ined ther gang, an' then lit out. I know I wuz a darn fool ter trust him," the man hastened to add, with apologetic humility, as though anticipating criticism of his suggested display of confidence, "but he kindo' caught me on the blind side like."

Hen, who had lighted a pipe and was smoking in a mood of contented acceptance of the various phases of this present life and the life past and the life to come, blew a cloud of smoke and let it go at that.

"I see jewels a-hangin' in the trees, an' a-gleamin' in the bushes," cried the wild female of the wood. Two keen, piercing eyes quickly vanished from an opening in a neighboring thicket, whence they had been stealthily peering. "I sees," rambled on the strange woman, "gold bubbles in the air," her voice took on a chanting rhythm. "I hears voices of the spirits in the forest, and the footsteps—" she strained her hearing, for a moment, at the adjacent bush, where had, but a moment since, gleamed the eyes—"the footsteps of angels in the clouds."

Her companions, at last, seemed to have forgotten the erratic creature's presence or existence, and were absorbed in low voiced conversation.

"I could elect Ben Grigscomb to congress," Black Hank was saying.

“What good would that do?” asked the other.

“We’d manage to help ourselves,” retorted the robber leader, with a peculiar emphasis. “I’ve had some experience in politics,” there was a curious smile on the man’s face, which made his countenance resemble that of a dangerous and untamed animal showing its teeth in a menacing snarl.

“Say, Hank, tell us something. No one knows anything uv ye, nohow. Where’d ye kum from?” the questioner fell back in sudden and unfeigned alarm. His companion leaned forward with a sudden fierce lunge and seized a burning brand from Rachel’s fire. He spasmodically thrust this, blazing, almost into the other’s face.

“When you burn, you’ll know; not before.” The brand was tossed, without further speech, back into the flames, where the outlaw chieftain watched it blaze, with a heavy, lowering scowl upon his dark and bitter face.

“But, Hank,—”

The captain of the outlaws half drew a revolver. He recollected himself; thrust it back into his pocket. He nodded menacingly and significantly at his associate; and was never questioned again.

The dismayed and baffled companion of the outlaw leader, following this singular outburst of disordered frenzy, from his chief,, sat in silence, while the other, for the time and lost to his surroundings, brooded by the fire. The lawless chieftain lay stretched, at full length, before the flames, and, with his elbows set hard in the ground and his chin supported in his tensely drawn fingers, was gazing intently into the blaze,—the firelight casting a dull, red glow upon his dark, swarthy, bearded features.

“Where *did* he come from?” the question might never, again, in his lifetime, be brought home to the

mysterious and noted outlaw; "but where, indeed, had he come from,—and what had driven him to this!" filtered through his mind, as in an unspoken soliloquy. "His claim upon a government for justice, refused; he, himself, in his righteous demands, set aside, on behalf of corrupt and dishonest interests—passed by for base, unfair political favoritism; slighted, scoffed at, jeered, scorned and treated with contempt,—where, truly, had he come from, and what had driven him to this! The bribery of national power to use its precious means of justice to an honest constituency for the horde of lawless despoilers of government had brought him to this, and he had come from the land where such things are allowed. Nor did he now desire to correct the system (the poison had done its work), by his identification with a man actively associated with the affairs of the community—Benjamin Grigscomb,—in an effort to elect a representative (!) of the people,—he merely wanted power—power to requite and destroy his enemies, that was all. Where did he come from!"

The companion of the musing and forlorn outcast hesitatingly broke the silence.

"Would Ben Grigscomb let you run him for congress?" queried the cowed freebooter shifting his gaze from his leader's sinister and threatening visage, and directing it across the fire to the figure of Rachel Bolers still sitting in her old position close to the glowing, flickering coals.

"I'll manage that," returned Black Hank. He was silent a moment. Then, as if he had finally dismissed the memory of their late dissension, he proceeded, "Grigscomb, I tell you, 's out fur anything. Billy White, maybe, 'll go agin' him, but that ain't a-goin' to make no difference. Tho' White's honest. Honest!" repeated the man; "we all were, once."

"I'm with you, Hank, o' course, ef they's anything in it."

"You leave that to me," said the other.

Somewhere in the wood, the scream of a wildcat sounded thrice. If a signal, it was obeyed by the two outlaws; Rachel Bolers continuing, to all appearances, unconscious of her surroundings.

"Come," commanded the leader, rising quickly to his feet from his seat among the mosses and grasses of their forest rendezvous, "we must be havin' a bite an' git away."

With some general instructions to Rachel, which she seemed to comprehend with a degree of intelligence, and hastily swallowing their food, the outlaws vanished in the surrounding forest.

The darkness had thickened in the glen. The great trees, about, looked ghostly and grim in the vague shadows. Dim outlines of rocks, here and there, stood out, and the faint trickle of a running brook was heard, not far off.

The bushes that had before moved stirred again. They parted, and the stealthy form of a man emerged noiselessly into view.

"Now's the time, if she's only got her wits about her," muttered he.

He came forward to where Rachel sat. He touched her softly on the arm.

"Who be ye?" she asked. "Be ye the spirit uv justice?"

"Ye might ha' said worse," rejoined the other. "I ain't sure, party, but what I may prove that, afore I'm over this 'ere present cruise."

"What ye want?" said Rachel.

"Lots o' things—just lots o' things," replied the man, though in a subdued tone of prudent caution. He

glanced about, as though to assure himself of safety in proceeding further. "D'yo think," he went on coaxingly, "'yo' could foller me intellijuntly, missis?" The secret visitor to this spot appeared to be conversant with Rachel Bolers' affliction.

"What ye want?" repeated Rachel, staring fixedly in the face of her questioner. "I ain't got no mind," she said plaintively.

"I know ye ain't—leastways," supplemented the other, coughing apologetically, "yer topgallant 's a trifle sprung, ye know, sometimes. Think ye could answer me a few questions, now," coaxed the speaker conciliatingly.

Rachel passed her hand over her eyes, and appeared to struggle with the meaning of her questioner's speech. "I'll try," she said.

"Good," said the man. "Tell me about Brad—Brad Simons, there's an ol' dear."

"I'll be his jedgment," flashed the woman.

"Yes, I know ye will," quickly acquiesced her examiner, fearful lest excitement should cause his subject to lose the sane thread of her thoughts. "An' quite right, my dear old lady, 'at ye should keel haul 'im and make 'im walk the plank. But what about him and Billy White,—an'—an'," her visitor added, in a tone of reverence, "about Miss De Braddock?" He thoughtfully placed his hand upon his chin covered with a short, dark beard, revealing, on the hand's back, tattoo marks of an anchor and ship, and glanced shrewdly at Rachel Bolers out of a pair of restless, twinkling eyes, and breathed the far off sea from every pore.

Struggling with her jangled faculties, Rachel mysteriously whispered,

"Ye know his housekeeper?"

"Whose housekeeper, missis?" asked the sailor.

"Brad's."

"Well, now," observed the seafaring character, scratching his head, and not disposed to display too much ignorance, "I might even know that 'ere sailin' wessel, ef ye'll describe it like."

The effort at continued rationality was apparently beginning to prove too much for the disposition or the power of mind of the sailor's informant. "See her," she once more whispered.

"The housekeeper?" queried her companion.

Rachel Bolers nodded.

"Shall I tell her, now, for instance, as any one sent me?" asked her visitor, in a cozy, comfortable tone.

"Ye kin tell 'er, 'at I kin stop Brad Simons from marryin' De Braddock, ef they don't stop my breathin'," Rachel glanced fearfully around, "afore I do it."

"What's ailin' yo' now?" said the man.

"Fate," said the woman.

"That's a name, mebbe, missis, fur them, 'at keeps ye here spliced to 'em ag'in' yer will, now?" rejoined Rachel Bolers' visitor coaxingly, apparently bent on obtaining all the information possible concerning those connected with the woman's following. The man, with a characteristic gesture, pushed his hat back from his forehead and displayed a deep scar. William White's tramp, acquitted of suspicion in the death of Zeke Smithin, was at work.

"I ain't allus dizzy in the head," vaguely exclaimed the distracted creature, "'n' I could tell yo' things, sometimes. Yes, I could."

"Now, there, I b'lieve ye could, so I do," her companion admitted humoringly.

"Yes, I could. But fate," said the woman grotesquely and mysteriously mowing at her guest,—“fate hinders me. Did ye know I wuz fate?” she queried, peering up into the other's face.

"Well, no; not exactly. Leastways," said the man, not knowing how far he might offend his singular acquaintance,—“leastways, I wuzn’t a-knowin’ uv it afore.”

“Well, I am, fur I don’t know what I be about. Ain’t that fate?”

The other was obliged to admit that it bore a strong family likeness to it.

“Yes, an’—” but she was, once more, vacant eyed.

“Kin ye tell me where the cave is?” asked her companion.

Here, the strange and singular woman gave evidence of a keen if not sensible realization of her position, and the emissary of White found himself unable to obtain anything further from her. However, he had his cue—Brad Simons’ housekeeper; and satisfying himself that nothing more was to be gained by risking the return of the outlaws, the sailor tramp slipped away in the bushes, leaving Rachel Bolers, lapsed into apparent oblivion of all about her, huddled up over the fire.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PICNIC.—JOHN BRADDOCK UNDER SUSPICION.

Ann Mariah Saunders and De Braddock planned a picnic, to which a number of congenial guests were to be invited; a neighboring grove of luxuriant beech and oak selected for the frolic in question supplying a place of sylvan beauty and retreat from the distracting world. Mother Braddock was going. Uncle Peter declared he would go, "ef thet 'air young cub Billy White 'u'd stay away." It was the gastronomic opportunity of Esau, the Braddock farmboy, who, big, fat and good natured, gloated over the prospect of dinner baskets bursting with the abundant resources of the rich farm region, visions of which generous provender filled the cavernous spaces of his appetite to the delay of many tasks of daily farm work, in the meantime. Parson Woods was to be there, and Job Saunders, Ann Mariah's shiftless brother, with many injunctions on the part of his prim, tidy sister, had been granted permission to attend. De was in her element and Mother Braddock put to her best. Indeed, great preparations were to be made, and Esau could scarcely wait till the day of banqueting came about. Despite the discontent of the old farmer with the necessity of wearing "store clothes," De had been advised of her father's intention of going to the picnic; and, hence, in view of the old man's obdurate objection to William White, the unhappy and much abused young writer presented a problem as to the introduction of the unfortu-

nate literary genius into the picnickers' midst that offered many difficulties of solution. It finally transpired that Uncle Peter was unexpectedly called away to a neighbor's farm, and White went to the picnic, in courageous defiance of the possibility of Peter's later arrival on the ground of recreation and pleasure.

In discussing the selection of the guests, William White had begged that Mrs. Walmsey, the engaging widow with whom he made his home, be asked.

"You seem very much interested in Mrs. Walmsey," De found occasion to remark, with something that might, without violence to the truth, have been construed to mean a snap of displeasure.

"She has, in many ways," replied the grateful and unconscious male gender, "been kind to me."

"Maybe you think more of Widow Walmsey than you do of anyone else," retorted De, flashing up into her companion's face a quick look of jealousy.

White didn't think he did.

And Widow Walmsey was included among those to be invited to the rustic frolic.

Mona Walker went to the picnic, but Brad Simons did not,—at least, the scheming cattleman was not favored with an invitation. It was sufficient for De to remember Mr. Simons' conduct in the gardens of Ann Mariah Saunders, to blacklist Brad effectually. Although Mona was talked about as Simons' probable future wife, nothing was generally known of the written and signed agreement of marriage between them, which had been stolen by the outlaws from the T— bank. Mona was of a reserved nature, and her matrimonial affairs with Brad were not of conclusive knowledge in the community. In spite of her unusual though in every way innocent attitude to society and the conventional community in the matter of her relations to Brad

Simons' domestic establishment, she was liked and understood by all who knew her. She was a great favorite with Mother Braddock, and it has been seen that De esteemed her highly. It is not certain how far Parson Woods might, at this time, have been received into her final maiden choice, had her marriage understanding with the cattle trader been out of the way; and Woods, on his part, showed a marked disposition in the girl's favor.

At the Braddock farm, all was bustle and preparation. Mrs. Braddock was to add to the tasty stores of Ann Maria's provision such baskets of good things, and bottles of elderberry wine, and cans of milk and jugs of cider for those devoted to less exhilarating beverages, and feastings of preserves, with rich and savory chickens boiled whole and fried, too, and such thousands of edible and drinkable etceteras, that the farmboy, shaking in his plentitude of flesh, all but swooned in the delights of anticipation.

De was up with the chickens. Think of it, O city folks! You who retire at such an hour—your heads swim at thoughts of a spell of swift flying pleasures launched at break o' day. Can we realize, now, that, then, good people, even on farms, lay themselves down to sleep at the same hour as the fowls they rose with? And dear De was everywhere; helping her mother; jogging good natured, sluggish Esau; tying Uncle Peter's cravat, when that patriarch came stumping into the kitchen, mildly, and none too mildly, either, anathematizing the "store clothes," aforesaid, and making herself the bright, flashing star of genius to warm, irradiate and assemble into sparkling harmony the general mass of things. Bless her heart!

And let me tell you, when it came to *dressing* for the parts to be played at this picnic, the interesting Widow

Walmsey struck the keynote of holiday robes, and had arrayed herself in gay and dazzling splendor. The corn-yellow silk gown, with figurings of Indian red, the brilliant and successful mainstay of the widow's valued but limited wardrobe, had been employed by her, to-day, with what proved a deep and bewildering design, and greatly enhanced her undoubted charms and graces. Little half-mitts of black silk enclosed her small, shapely hands, while her brown hair was drawn demurely and plainly over her pretty ears. A wonderful creation in purple adorned her head. And, lo! Job Saunders was the object of these gauds and allurements of female arts cherished by the sprightly and engaging angler, with tenacious and unyielding affection and purpose, from olden days of past and triumphant glories. To Saunders, when his fascinated gaze first rested upon this vision of inconceivable loveliness and beauty, in his deeply stirred sense of divine perfection there came something akin to the faint, faroff music of the spheres. The singular and hidden attachment of his rural and determined admirer gave early promise of breaking from its long and heretofore unnoticed and smouldering state into a flame of mutual strength and satisfactoriness.

Widow Walmsey and Job Saunders certainly, that day, were a surprise to all who knew them. Why the widow had chosen a monument of idleness and poverty it would be hard to tell. O love,—oh, eternal mystery!

The old male bird of the house of Saunders had, in a roving spirit, abandoned the straws and sticks of his nest, at a period remote from the beginning of our narrative, and left his young, in the vernacular of the present day, to "hustle" for themselves. Ann Maria had no recollection of the maternal care; and Job and she had lived upon, developed and made as much of the

frugal plot of ground belonging to the elder Saunders as possible; although, as her brother Job would not help, to any appreciable or observable extent, Ann soon found it necessary to employ a male hand, on whom she could depend for a certain amount of steady work; but beyond this she contrived, unaided, as the bright redeeming blossom in this garden of Saunders' weeds, to keep "a-going."

There was a mythical legend humorously current among the neighbors, in which the senior Mr. Saunders' descendants were wont to seriously believe, that, some day, the elder Saunders was coming back to Indiana and its population, rich, honored and full of repentance.

As Job rode into the grove where the merrymaking was to be, his own appearance was worthy of note. He wore a long, blue, swallow tail coat which, with its brass buttons had at some previous time supplied full dress for the senior member of his house. His lower limbs were clad in light gray trousers. His head supported a large, full brim, very old, once white, plush, bell crown high hat. This latter article of headgear, likewise descending from the elder and recreant head of the Saunders' household to his son, had, for years, so afflicted Job's suffering soul that many anxious devices had been employed by him to get rid of, destroy or lose it, and force conclusions to the procurement of a newer and more modern headpiece. One of the artifices resorted to by the wretched sufferer for the elimination of the white bell crown from his life had been to place the article in the path of a falling tree, felled for the purpose of crushing the objectionable piece of headgear, but, like the fabled cat of nursery days that had nine lives, the hat had survived, and returned, to mix figures a little, like Banquo's ghost, "to plague the inventor."

The bell crown still clung to Job like a fragrant spice of long ago.

When all had finally arrived at the spot pitched upon for the woodland holiday, each fell to the allotted portion of his or her duties.

William White, in a state of watchfulness regarding the expected arrival, at a later hour, of Uncle Peter, when the condemned writer should seek seclusion in the neighboring grove, tarried in the glade under favor of Mrs. Braddock, as well as under that of Mrs. Braddock's highly favored daughter.

Martha Braddock was guiding and directing her feminine forces something after the manner of an old blue hen with a small but extremely valued brood of chickens, and De, recognized as next in importance, was instructing Ann Mariah Saunders, as occasion offered, just how to most effectively match their joint palatial spread of good cheer for the coming feast. Where the women were had been selected the greenest and softest mosses, the smoothest sward and the most seductive shade.

"Esau," called Mrs. Braddock, "come here." Esau came as bidden.

"I do b'lieve, that—no, here it is—thought I'd left the mustard, an' pepper sass behin'," said Mother Braddock, much relieved. "Esau, help De and Ann Mariah, there."

"Now, Esau, you just go 'long,—you men keep away," and De, at the same time, glanced certainly archly and hastily from beneath her lowered eyelids to see that William White, in a most becoming and fitting outing cap, white duck trousers and characteristic loose, blue, sack coat, had not been closer than necessary, and overheard, in too literal a sense, a speech fraught with what might prove such undesirable and discourag-

ing results. And De's lovely and attractive face and bright eyes looked out from beneath the most captivating of cream colored leghorn hats, the broad, ravishing brim of which essential piece of feminine attire scarcely concealed the little curls that clustered around her brow, quite driving William White distracted. Around the waist of a dainty white frock she wore an effective sash of broad, cherry hued ribbon, while her feet, encased in delicate wear and peeping prettily from under the edge of the shortened gown, showed with further twinkling seductiveness to hopelessly complete the conquest of poor, mere man.

Bob Likkum, in an amazing red waistcoat and dark flowing tie, together with a coat and nether garment of linen buff, and a wide, country straw hat set smartly on one side of his head, was hovering interestingly near Ann Mariah, in her own dainty pearl gray apparel, that damsel being busy extracting a fly from a jar of preserves which she had just opened. Miss Ann's swain stoutly maintained his ground, nor yielded to further spoken or unspoken behests, on the part of either Ann Mariah or De, to depart.

“Parson—”

“William—”

Simultaneously, called Martha Braddock and De.

The two thus addressed came to attention, while Ann Mariah, Mrs. Braddock, De and Bob Likkum ceased their various occupations, and, in the attitudes in which they found themselves, when the sound of a distant shot reached the glade, were listening and gazing in its direction.

“Oh!” exclaimed Ann Mariah; “they’ll shoot this way.”

“What’s that shooting, parson?” called Mother Braddock.

“William, what is it?” cried De,—“some one gunning?”

“Kalk’late,” put in Bob Likkum drily,—“seems kind o’ likely.”

“Hello!” shouted White; “don’t shoot this way.”

“It’s all right,” remarked the parson; “won’t do any harm, I judge.”

“Hope not,” was Mrs. Braddock’s comment, as the women returned to their occupations.

But White continued to call until he secured a faint answering shout, in the distance.

“Parson Woods,” said William White, while Job and the fat farmboy continued to feast their eyes in silence—the farmboy his upon the goodly stores of rare and enticing eatables that were now rapidly assuming shape upon a snowy cloth spread upon the mossy ground, and the sentimental and stricken Job his own upon the fair presence of the alluring Widow Walmsey,—“parson,” said White, “I heard West Flank say that there was some doubt of the guilt of that man the lynch-ers were going to string up the other day. Did you hear, when you rode to meeting, yesterday? I saw to it that he had a lawyer, but that mortgage on my place—foreclosure, you know—kept me from attending his preliminary examination before the justice of the peace.” White did not speak further of his special interest in the suspected tramp, and Parson Woods did not question him, as White’s humanitarianism and special acts of kindness were proverbial and constant, anyway.

“Why, yes,” said the parson,—“seems as if they couldn’t make a case against him. It appears that he had picked up the gun belonging to Zeke, and which was found in the prisoner’s possession, out of the ditch, after the body of Zeke Smithin had been carried away; and Zeke’s hat, which it was charged the accused man had

appropriated, was, afterwards, discovered covered with blood, close at hand, near where the body of Zeke had lain. Someone, not with the mob the day of the attempted lynching, saw the man pick up the gun after the body had been removed, and, in the matter of the hat, the suspected man's own hat resembled Zeke's. This thing," concluded Parson Woods, "of circumstantial evidence and mistaken identities is a very serious matter, it seems to me."

"It certainly is," responded White.

"There is a rumor or suspicion," added Woods in a low tone, "connecting John Braddock, in some way, with the Smithin affair."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed White quickly.

The parson pointed a finger admonishingly in the direction of Mother Braddock and De. "It is beginning to be wondered where John got the money to pay his note to Brad Simons," said Woods.

"Is there anything," rejoined White, "strange about a business man getting a little money together and paying off an obligation?"

"No," answered Parson Woods; "but there has arisen somehow an unaccountable and, I think, most unworthy suspicion affecting the taking of the sum Zeke was robbed of when killed."

"My God!" ejaculated White; "they don't suspect—"

"That John Braddock, who threatened, on account of his wife Nance, to kill Zeke, murdered Zeke Smithin for revenge, and afterwards took the money? that is what this most extraordinary rumor in town means," gravely replied the parson. "I know John—man and boy—better than you do, William," said the minister, continuing with great emphasis, as he perceived William

White about to speak,—“he could not any more have done it, than I could.”

“Parson,” said White with feeling, impulsively seizing the oher’s hand, “you’re true blue!”

“What you shakin’ hands fur,” cried Job Saunders; going away, parson,—goin’ ter stay with the picnie to dinner, ben’t you?” The dinner was almost ready, arrival upon the ground having occurred, through one delay and another, at nearly the hour of noon.

White saw some answer had to be made, and, refusing to trust to the preacher’s invincible powers of truth, spoke up hastily, “I was just showing him how the city bunco operator works the gentlemen who visit him from your section of the country, Job,” at which good natured and apt reply a general laugh followed.

“Hush!” cautioned Woods, as Mother Braddock passed near them.

“But who could have possibly inspired such a thing about John?” queried White of the preacher.

“William, I am at a loss to think,” rejoined the simple minded minister, who could not bring himself to voice the apprehension that had arisen in his own soul in regard to Brad Simons’ probable part in the circulation of such a charge against the brother of De. It was hard, too, for the single minded man of God to comprehend how Simons might hope, in any way, to advantage himself with De Braddock or another, by such a course. And, in truth, Simons himself had hesitated long, and had only yielded to the cunning utterance, in town, of his own suspicious surmises concerning John Braddock in the Smithin tragedy when, smarting under De’s late punishment, he had sought some way of vengeance on the Braddock house. It was not until later that Brad Simons found means in the Smithin affair to cause John Braddock’s sister to yield to his suit.

O shadows,—O phantoms of injustice,—O greed and sorrow, do you hover close to this!

CHAPTER XXII.

SMOKY BILLINGS.—THE ARREST OF JOHN BRADDOCK.

The acquittal of the man whom the lynchers had attempted to hang was attended with little of interest, other than that which has been expressed in the statement of Parson Woods to William White. Only in respect of one circumstance attending the hearing on his case did matter of sufficient importance transpire in the further concerns of the trial of the lynchers' intended victim to warrant additional allusion to his appearance before the local justice of the peace. The incident referred to the man's name.

Upon arraignment of the prisoner, the question was asked:

“What is your name?”

It, thereupon, transpired that the prisoner, accustomed to the airy neighborhood of haystacks and roadside lodgings, had contracted a heavy cold which, affecting his tonsils, had caused an inflamed and swollen condition to result, rendering speech, on the part of the subject, of considerable difficulty. Attempting to explain this inability of utterance preventing capable answers, on his part, in the examination, the prisoner at the bar replied or attempted to reply to the query affecting his name:

“Choky swellings,” meaning, with certain expressive gestures of his hands in the region of his throat, that his organs of speech were temporarily disabled for satisfactory response, by reason of his affliction.

The answer, such as it was, came to the apprehension of the magistrate in stifled and wholly unintelligible accents, and, placing his own construction upon the reply, the court had instructed the clerk to write the prisoner down as "Smoky Billings."

So the man was christened; and, for many years after, this character was known and respected in the community by the title recorded in the office of the Justice of the Peace, at the town of T——.

That hour, of all hours the dearest and most precious to the heart and soul of ye true picnicker! had, at last, arrived, and Mrs. Braddock announced all was in readiness for a general congregation around the hospitable board, or snowy-white-covered mossy-ground substitute for that delightful medium of entertainment.

The newly awakened billings—not Smoky Billings—and cooings of Job Saunders,—who had, at all events, not been deprived of good looks,—and the gracious widow, placed in the unwitting general arrangements side by side at the picnic spread, were unmistakable. Bob Likkum, Ann Mariah and the bright glances directed from the eyes of De, as revivers of any flagging zeal that might seize upon the heart of William White, added zest to the occasion. Mona Walker, Esau's former teacher, took refuge with the fat boy, while Mrs. Braddock and Parson Woods were well content, though somewhat scandalized by the widow and Job, to sit at their respective sage and sober points at the feast and see enacted the story that we are never tired of hearing or of telling, and never will tire of hearing or of telling, to the end of time.

"Here's a wishbone, Ann Mariar," expostulated Bob Likum, upon Ann's sudden withdrawal from the detaining grasp of the overpowered Robert of her own delicate fingers which had been snatched, by the ardent wooer, in

the too evident presence of the full company, "an' I'll wish with ye, an' we'll *see* ef I don't git my wish," this assurance of future realization, by a peculiar mental process not here explained, appearing to afford the rebuked lover a satisfactory justification of his recent descent upon the tempting hand of Ann Mariah. Bob's remarks were duly attended by a presentation, in form, of the wishbone, and the pulling apart of the same by him and Ann at once followed.

So, De finding a wishbone in the wealth of chicken skeletons, there were two wishbone pullings instead of one, the second pulling including one William White, the significance of which proceedings being those subtle steps leading to the inevitable by and by in store for man and maid

"De, get another pie,—this boy," Mother Braddock having reference to the now bloated Esau, "has devoured hull, I think, about three, and four chickens—"

"Nothin' the kind, Miss De," wheezed Esau,— "don't you b'lieve 'er,—I ain't had nothin', 't all," which, to an unbiased observer, partook in statement from Esau not only of the most undeniable character of falsehood, but, had it been true that the results of Esau's banquet could have been considered "nothing," it would have made of "something" a quantity to baffle the computation of the distinguished and immortal author of calculus.

"Bob," whispered White, with sly expression, leaning over to Likkum, "the widow will have plenty of idle time on her hands, when she gets Job!"

"A clock that don't go is always right, twice a day," oracularly responded Bob.

"Parson Woods," said Mrs. Braddock, "you'll drink some o' this here elderberry wine, I'm sure?"

As the parson took from the outstretched hand of

Mother Braddock the bottle of wine, which species of gentle intoxicant constituted the good pastor's only form of dissipation, there broke upon the air the sound of a song crooned at a point, nearby, in the wood between the revelers and the river not far distant,

"Bonny, my child,
Bonny and wee,
Eyes blue and mild,
That only can see
Mother above, bending and low,
Over thy cradle,
Rocking thee so."

The words ceased with a long, sad, wailing note—the cry of the bereaved.

"Rachel—Rachel Bolers," said someone in a hushed voice.

At this instant, Brad Simons, carrying a gun and followed by a hunting dog, came from behind the trees, where he had been standing for some time an unseen observer, and advanced into the clearing where the merrymakers were assembled. He approached and bowed with no apparent restraint in his manner and with a certain appearance of ostentatious friendliness not easy, at first, to understand, but which, presently, much to De's confusion, was partially justified.

A glance from De's eye, conveying a sense of his having come an uninvited guest, caused the grazier to say quickly,

"I am sure all present here will pardon me, but, as you have done my poor land the honor to hold your picnic on it,—"

It was, alas! for De, the truth. From time immemorial, had this grove been used for camp meetings, picnics, political barbecues and what not? and so mat-

ter-of-course a thing had it become to use it, that a sense of public property in the grove had grown up in the minds of the country people.

Brad had been informed, by one of his drovers, of the intended merrymaking. He had come out, with his gun and dog, with no other object than to execute this strategic descent upon the rustic roysterers.

"My goodness! Bradford," exclaimed Mother Braddock, "ef you don't put in some kind uv evidence to property holdin' in this 'ere grove, you'll hev' someun' claimin' it, 'ith all this here other people's 'propriatin' it. Sit down—sit down," continued the hospitable and unaffected countrywoman, "an' hev' a bite."

"That there bein' the sentiments fur the occasion, ladies and gents," observed a picturesque figure, quietly emerging from the wood, "I'd like to join the festive scene, if the skipper of this 'ere picnickin' vessel has no objection,—'bein', as a friend of mine once said, 'nearly my dinner hour.' "

De, with a look of surprise, recognized, in the new arrival, the threatened victim of the late ineffectual attempt at lynching.

White sat in silence, waiting developments. He had not seen his co-worker, to speak with him, since their fortuitous and significant day by the river.

The newcomer, a tramp, the lord of the road, the supreme freemaster, wore his insignia of freedom and princely rags with an unrestrained air of easy and swaggering unconcern equal to that of the graceful and devil-may-care Don Caesar de Bazan himself; and little recking the trials of the rolling, heaving deep of the past. A much worn black felt hat was on his head of dark, shaggy hair, while his whiskers, of the tint and character of the hair, spread in a profuse mass over his firm jaws and broad tanned face. The eyes were keen

and piercing,—now, twinkling with good humor; and the large, strong mouth wore an expression of smiling complacency. The good ship was battered, but the free winds of the ocean of life still bore it gallantly on.

De said nothing, as her gaze once more dwelt upon the ingratiating features of the countenance of the former threatened and rescued victim of the lynchers; while her mind went back to the day on the dusty old Wabash road, where, with courage and daring akin to that of heroines of old, she had controlled a mob bent upon this man's summary and unmerited destruction.

"Mother," said De, hurriedly, "let him have dinner," and the others being long ere this satisfied, not to say, in the case of one Esau, stuffed, Smoky Billings was invited to seat himself upon the springy mosses affording support for the diners and fall to upon the ample remains of the generous and welcome woodland banquet.

If Billings now saw, or recognized if he saw, the wondering and watching De (who had her fascinated and stirring gaze fastened upon the unmoved and famished man much as a layman will devour the features of an actor who, for the first time, is noticed abroad), it was not manifest. He cleared away the remains of the dinner that was placed before him,—or that, with perfect composure, he drew within the cricle of his portion of the table cloth,—including a remnant, amounting to half a bottle of Mother Braddock's select elderberry wine, with slow, solemn and grave deliberation, circumspectly restraining his devouring wants to the agreeable proprieties of the occasion.

It was observable that, from time to time, the thoughtful eater turned his eyes—he did not move his head, but revolved his eyes in their sockets after the manner of the beacon in a lighthouse—upon the picnickers surrounding him, and especially was he noticed to

fix, for fleeting seconds, those rotating orbs upon the lingering and constrained person of Mr. Brad Simons.

Mr. Smoky Billings having, at Mother Braddock's pressing and good hearted solicitation, comfortably tucked away a last piece of apple pie, slowly rose to his feet. As he did so in dignified and impressive silence, it was apparent that the personage whom he had fixed upon as the "skipper of this 'ere picnickin' vessel," before alluded to by the wanderer, was Mrs. Braddock, for he approached that lady with a sufficiently gentlemanly deportment, and, in a strong bass voice, which rumbled richly in his throat, said,

"Thankee, mum," and smiled twinklingly and quite attractively.

The self-possessed and unconcerned visitor then moved off easily in the direction of the surrounding wood enclosing the little vale, and noiselessly disappeared among the trees whence he had just come.

Dinner over, Ann Mariah and Bob passed into the deeper and more mysterious seclusions and retreats of the grove. Even the widow and Job proceeded, in some soft and secret understanding, into the wood.

It was now White's turn with De, and when these two took their own way among the trees, Mrs. Braddock left the litter of the feast, and, in respect of restoring articles to baskets, remarking,

"Time enough, when they come back," seated herself in a chair, taken for the purpose from the red farm wagon, to enjoy a nap.

Brad Simons, drawing interest on the investments of selfishness, and cutting the coupons of the bonds of unkindness, had had a long spell of dreary commonplaces with those whom the departed lovmakers had left behind; when, finally, Parson Woods following a chat with Mona, much to Simons' complete discomfiture and con-

fused sense of jealousy with De Braddock and William White in contemplation, sauntered off with Miss Walker for a stroll.

Brad gazed, with scarcely concealed disgust, first after the parson and Mona, and next at Mrs. Braddock comfortably seated in a chair and soundly asleep.

With something like a bit of ironical humor struggling for expression in his face, he soliloquized,

"Entertaining company on a gentleman's own premises," and turned to go.

William White had seated De on a log not far off, in the wood, and was returning to the glade for the purpose of procuring her a glass of water from the bucket, which the fat farmboy had, at one time in the day, laboriously filled from a spring in the vicinity.

White, bent upon his commission, had taken several steps from the wood into the clearing, when he almost ran into Brad Simons sauntering slowly away. The hastening writer avoided the encounter and reached the water bucket.

"Heard the news?" asked the cattleman.

"What news?" queried White indifferently, rising, at the same time, from his bending posture over the water receptacle, having filled his glass.

"Another arrest in the Zeke Smithin murder case."

"Who, this time?"

"Tom Bolers, John Braddock's brother in law."

The writer uttered an involuntary exclamation.

"Nance's brother!"

"You see," said Brad Simons, "some money paid out by Tom has been identified by the faro dealer, as that which Zeke won"

William White continued to gaze silently at his companion. He was thinking of the trouble this would bring to another so dear to himself; for that which would pain

John's heart, through his wife, would pain De's through John.

"It's a bad case," said Simons who, to do the latter justice, it is but fair to say could not, in view of the evidence that had been discovered, but entertain suspicions of young Bolers; "but that's not the worst of it," added the speaker

"What more?" quickly ejaculated the other man, a swift, indefinable instinct of alarm and apprehension seizing him.

"John Braddock's been arrested for the murder of Zeke Smithin, along with Tom."

White dropped the glass he held in his hand and, striking a stone, the drinking vessel broke in splintered fragments, splashing the water it contained about, and plenteously besprinkling the slumbering and gorged Esau, who was extended at full length beneath the farm wagon, and who was aroused from an interesting and absorbing dream that he had been made the unhappy victim of a sudden and overwhelming cloudburst, consisting of undigested pies, chickens and cider!

Uncle Peter Braddock, unexpectedly arriving at that moment, cried:

"What's that?"

And Mother Braddock, just awakening, called out,

"What's the matter, Peter?"

"What keeps you, William?" brightly questioned De, gaily stepping into the open space and meeting the consternation there.

And Bob Likkum, Ann Mariah, Job Saunders and Widow Walmsey, drawn by some secret sympathy, came simultaneously into view, within the enclosure of cleared ground, only to become instantly fixed in attitudes of sympathetic regard and attention.

The discomposed and slumberously ill used farmboy

Esau shook himself and scrambled to a sitting position under the wagon; Parson Woods struggled to his feet, and even the Braddock Newfoundland alertly came and sniffed growlingly at Simons' legs.

At this instant, Smoky Billings appeared slowly on the scene. He had his hands in his pockets and stopped, with no seeming interest, within easy distance of Brad Simons and, happening to catch his roving glance, stood eying that gentleman with frank and unruffled composure.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN UNEXPLAINED VISITOR FROM KENTUCKY FILLS THE
ATMOSPHERE WITH DEEPEST MYSTERY.

Old Peter Braddock bore the shock of John's arrest with unexpected composure, and threw himself, farm-lands and universal possessions into the defense of his offspring with a vigor and energy that knew no bounds. Mother Braddock wept; but, on the whole, was tranquil under the ministrations of Parson Woods, and her own sublime faith in her boy. De took John's arrest harder than anyone, though in no way permitting herself to slacken her efforts in behalf of her brother, or cast disappointment, discouragement or gloom upon the efforts of others in the same direction.

One of the most singular things about the situation was the effect it had on the strained and prejudiced personal relations at this time existing between Farmer Braddock and William White. The really acute and well trained mind of the capable and promising writer, brought to bear upon the difficulties in Mr. Braddock's surroundings, enabled a generous and forgiving disposition in the literary man to secure a corresponding tolerance, on the farmer's part, of the writer's earnest and effective efforts to inject comfort and philosophic if not practical counsel into the afflicted man's life. The troubled old Hoosier's opinion of the younger man now soared to a height of respect and confidence in the tried old fellow's hour of adversity.

"De, child," remarked Mrs. Braddock, one morning shortly following the day of the memorable picnie in Simons' Grove, "do you 'pear ter hev' any idee that Job Sa'nders, reely, hez ser'us intentions, 'bout Widder Wa'msey?"

"Shouldn't wonder, mother," was De's reply, with a look of perplexed amusement, as she turned to her father just coming into the kitchen, from the yard.

"Peter," said mother, turning to Uncle Peter entering with a load of firewood in his arms, "do make that boy Esau do them chores."

"All right, Marthy," responded the vigorous old man, dropping the wood resoundingly on the pile by the stove. "There comes William, De," added the farmer looking off, through a window, upon the road, where, in the language of the old fashioned novelist, "a solitary horseman might have been seen wending his way." The father's voice was gravely considerate in this brief address to the girl; but, brief as were the words, the significance of his manner touched his daughter, and she rose from where she was sitting, and, putting an arm around the old gentleman's neck, drew his face to hers and kissed him.

"There, there, you be a good girl," he said, patting his daughter's cheek with his callous, toil hardened fingers, "an'," added the father, "it's a great comfort, jes' now, an' God is good!" and the old man devoutly and reverentially raised his gaze on high and passed out of the kitchen, as he had come in.

"Hello there, house!" at this moment shouted a voice from the road, and Uncle Peter turned back into the kitchen with the remark,

"That ain't William's voice, tho' I seen him," and went on through the house and out to the open front

door, where he was heard, the next moment, to call, heartily,

“Howdee, West,—’light,” which speech Mr. Braddock regarded as an invitation for West Flank, sitting on horseback in the road, to alight, uttered and stood silent.

“Can’t—can’t get down, Peter—got a message fur ye, thet’s all.”

“Come in, come in,—ye kin tell it jes’ as well inside the house, Wes’, reckon,” urged the hospitable Hoosier.

“Can’t do it—can’t get down, I mean, Peter,—impossible; but I wanter tell ye, a man down to town, las’ night, tell me, ’at a man—sick nigh there—hez your name—stranger. Know him?”

“My name?” inquiringly and blankly replied Uncle Peter.

“Yep,” said West.

“Mother,” called Uncle Peter, helplessly, “won’t ye come here?”

Mrs. Braddock promptly put in an appearance at her husband’s side in the doorway.

“Did ye say,” went on Uncle Peter addressing his wife, “that Hiram wuz a-comin’ to visit us from Kentucky?”

“Yes, Peter; why do you ask?” was Mrs. Braddock’s natural reply.

“Why, here be a man down nigh about town, ’at Wes’ says hez our name. He be sick, too. I say, Wes’, wuz his name Hiram?” asked Peter, looking questioningly at West Flank.

“Egg-zackly what it was,” answered Flank from the road, respectfully.

“Mother, that’s him,” said Uncle Peter turning back quickly to Martha,—“Cousin Hi.”

“Well, now, Peter, I’ll allow!” Mrs. Braddock ex-

claimed in a tone of great astonishment; why, the pore fellow!—much sick, Wes'?" called Mother Braddock, in her turn.

"Pooty sick, Mis' Braddock," rejoined West Flank, rubbing the top of his horse's neck with his riding whip, while he kept his own face sympathizingly fixed in the direction of the house, from his continued seat on the back of the horse.

"Peter, go right and see," directed Mrs. Braddock, flatly.

At this moment, William White rode up at a slow walk, and West Flank, earnestly and heartfeltly thanked by Peter and mother, cantered on in response to his own unavoidable haste, throwing back profuse, generous and sincere wishes that the condition of the Braddock relative might not prove desperate or beyond hope.

Peter Braddock and William White went to see the sick man who, under the, to Peter and Martha, familiar name of Hiram Braddock, had been taken in by a friendly Samaritan in the vicinity of the county seat and cared for in his painful and unlooked for affliction.

De, at her own earnest solicitation, was permitted to make one of the party, and the red farm wagon, followed by the Newfoundland dog and containing Unele Peter, White and De, and even Mother Braddock at the last moment, jolted dutifully to town in one of those surprising daily events in which a strange and wonderful network of chance moves the world in a ceaseless revolution of miseries and joys.

Peter Braddock was pained and shocked enough to find in the sick stranger his Kentucky relative Hiram Braddock. But it had transpired worse with his kinsman than reported to Peter, for the old Hoosier found the Kentuckian near death. He was unconscious, before

the arrival of his anxious and inquiring friends, and, so, long remained.

William White and Peter Braddock, the former of whom proving a worthy and now indispensable source of reliance to the troubled Indiana farmer in this last unexpected mishap, learned that Peter's kinsman, with marks of evident violence about his head and person, and unable to give any connected account of his troubles, had wandered at night to the door of the open hearted country people, who had received and kindly ministered to him.

In one of his pockets was found a receipted account bearing the name of the injured man, and, by this means, he had been satisfactorily identified.

After doing all that lay in their power for the unfortunate Kentuckian who had, before their arrival, been placed under the care of T——'s best medical aid, White and Uncle Peter Braddock with mother and De went over to the jail to see John.

John Braddock, following his arrest, had carried himself with the nerve that naturally belonged to his staunch old Western stock. His imprisonment, which had been made as comfortable as possible by the sheriff, had really not told much if any upon him, and it was only when mention was made of his fellow prisoner Tom Bolers, confined in a neighboring cell, that John Braddock gave evidence of anxiety or uneasiness.

All interested in the defendant in the celebrated cause of the State of Indiana versus John Braddock were sustained, in their conviction of John Braddock's innocence of the crime imputed to him, by their knowledge of the high character of his family and his own unblemished reputation for honesty and integrity. However, there are rarely absent those who, in moments of trial of sacred honors, lives and fortunes, will find some

breath of unusual suspicion, with which to taint the fair fame of the unhappy subject. And so, in the case of young Braddock, there were those who did not omit to say, "No good could come of anyone who had married a woman like Nance Bolers!" But John's friends paid no attention to this, and Uncle Peter, White, Mother and De proceeded to the jail with the feeling that nothing had been neglected to secure for son and friend and brother every promise of fair play.

To-day had been one of thoughtful unrest for John. He could not fail to be conscious of his own innocence; although the circumstances leading to his arrest for the murder and robbery of Smithin were such as to have afforded a serious warrant of inquiry into the aspect of the case in regard to even himself.

Many of us can recall how, by the acts of some artistic genius, the faces of distinguished public officials ornamenting our currency, in moments of idle fancy have been altered to resemble some other characteristic countenance, as of an old gentleman with a patch over one eye, and wearing a very disreputable looking smashed high, silk hat, together with the appearance of a short pipe protruding from his distorted and swollen lips. A bill so marked had been found among those with which John Braddock had paid the note given, by him, in Tom Bolers' interest, to Brad Simons. It was here that the formidable and threatening cattle merchant had been moved to the course he subsequently pursued.

Whatever the suspicion,—whether sufficient or insufficient,—which Brad Simons may have been previously prompted to entertain of his unscrupulous and dangerous associate, Jason Jump, relating to the cause of the death of Zeke Smithin, Simons saw fit to further completely and conspicuously ignore the brigand chief. In the dark and sinuous workings of his scheming mind,

he realized that here, at last, might be an unquestionable and uncontestable advantage to himself concerning De Braddock and De Braddock's brother.

He went with prompt decision to the faro dealer, whose bank Zeke was known to have broken. The gambler unhesitatingly identified the bill just described as one of those paid by him to Smithin, on the night the latter won and left triumphantly with the dealer's cash. With the suspicious and incriminating piece of money, in this manner positively known to have been in the possession of Braddock, it was, at this point, all too effectively remembered, by Brad, that John Braddock had, in the former's own hearing, threatened the life of Zeke Smithin. Brad proceeded directly to De's brother. Upon being questioned, John asserted that he had received the marked bill and its fellows from Tom Bolers, but denied all knowledge of any criminal source from whence the money might have originally been procured, by Tom. Simons' investigations necessarily if not by Brad's conscious and evil design caused Braddock and Bolers jointly to be arrested.

John was sitting and idly thrumming with his fingers upon the edge of the iron cot set along the wall of his narrow cell, in the T—— county jail, when the sheriff came to the door.

"Here's your pap, Johnny," announced the jail official, "come to see you. Cheer up," said the kind hearted officer, "you'll come through, all right."

John ceased the monotonous play of his fingers on the iron cot, and glancing up smiled brightly. He looked, at the instant, wonderfully like De. "Hope so, sheriff, and I guess I will. Father, there?" queried the prisoner, cheerfully.

"Yep, he be," rejoined the sheriff, who stepped aside,

allowing Mr. Braddock, senior, William White and party to occupy his place.

"Though it's ag'in' the rules," said the sheriff, "s'posin' you see him in my office," and the officer touched Farmer Braddock familiarly on the shoulder.

"W'y, I thankee, kindly, Zach," replied the farmer, and the party adjourned to a large and commodious room constituting the sheriff's own private office, where they were enabled, without restriction of bars, to be in fuller and more unrestrained communion.

"I guess, Peter, ye won't play me no tricks," said the sheriff in a satisfied tone, as he stepped towards the door with the manifestly delicate intention of leaving the company alone. He promptly withdrew, when,

"He'll stan' his trial," returned the stout old farmer.

John Braddock seated himself in the midst of his family; and turned his eyes slowly, by an involuntary impulse, upon William White and his sister De. as though, in some unknown way, relief might be sought in their direction.

After the customary exchange of intimate family attentions had been observed, a moment of quiet ensued.

"Ye say," said Uncle Peter, at length breaking the silence, "'at ye got the money uv Tom, an' that's all ye know about the matter?" as the old man spoke, he fixed a sympathizing look of earnest and wistful scrutiny upon his son's face.

"Yes, father," rejoined the son, "Tom brought me the money at a time when great need pressed me."

"And did no one see him pay you?" queried White. "Tom denies it, of course, as is to be expected. And you have no witness?"

"None," said John.

"But, Johnny," said mother, "ye knew that that 'ere

Tom Bolers wuz a thief er, whut was ez bad, a forgerer," added Mrs. Braddock, making the last word especially strong by the unconscious supply of an extra syllable.

"He took me off my guard," responded John. "He told me that he had received a favorable settlement in the land case, in which I knew him to have an interest of some kind before the courts. I never stopped to question him. I find he lied."

"Ye think he done this thing?" queried Peter Braddock.

"Murdered Smithin?" said John Braddock; "don't ask me."

"It looks bad," said White. "John," continued De's lover, "no one who knows you will ever suppose you had anything to do with the killing and robbing of Zeke Smithin, but the processes of the law will have to be satisfied, as you yourself well know. Where were you at eleven o'clock,—the time fixed, I believe, when this murder is said to have been committed,—on the night of the commission of the crime? Your defense, I think, should be an *alibi*. Can you tell where you were, at the time of the killing of Smithin? Think, now."

"Why," replied Braddock quite readily, "I was here in town. I came over from home on business."

"Can you prove it?" questioned White earnestly.

"Why, I suppose so," returned the suspected man, with that quick assurance which is the first impulse of those who think all should be as satisfied of their contention as they themselves.

"John," said William White seriously, and De sat watching the faces of William and her brother with devouring intensity, "'suppose' won't do. You must *know*. Can you swear positively to the place where you were, other than at the scene of the killing, on the night and at the time in question?"

Braddock was readily able to say that he could,—that he stood, for a few moments, in front of the Travers Hotel, at about the hour of eleven, on the night referred to.

“So far, so good,” commented White. “Do you know anyone who, likewise, knows you were there? Pardon me,” he hastened to add, thinking he saw a shade of reproach cross De’s face that the questioner’s examination of her brother should seem to imply any doubt of the latter’s veracity, “but a law of evidence will demand corroboration of the—of John’s testimony,” consideration for those present had prevented him from saying, “the prisoner’s.”

John Braddock replied that he had seen several people, that night, on business—the night Zeke Smithin came by his death. He had left one of his business acquaintances, the most important and the one whom he had really come to T—to see, for De’s brother did not live in the town in which he now lay imprisoned,—he had left this man about ten o’clock, and after that—ah, there was the rub!—after that, he had walked about aimlessly for an hour, passing time until bedtime, and—*alone*.

“Exactly what the prosecution wants, and will make the most of,” exclaimed White thoughtlessly, for he saw De change color, and even John Braddock stirred uneasily in his chair; while Mother and Uncle Peter Braddock were pale to the lips under the tension. William White hurriedly added that which, to do him justice, he had already thought to say, “and,” he said emphatically, “we know now what to do; some one must be found to testify to seeing John in front of the hotel.”

“Someone must be found to testify to seeing John in front of the hotel,” the words of William White kept

ringing in De's ears. "Someone must be found to testify to seeing John in front of the hotel."

"Well, now, see here," said Uncle Peter, "you don't 'tend to say, William, 'at it can't be did—can't find nary one to swear to where John wuz, do ye?"

Mother hung on the writer's words as White, not liking to let those present know the doubts that harassed his own mind, hesitated as to what to say. Finally he replied to Uncle Peter's anxious inquiry,

"Never fear, Uncle Peter, we'll find someone," and the literary man's tones were so cheerful and confident that encouragement and hope were carried with them to the hearts of everybody, and Mother Braddock drew a sigh of relief.

De was silent during the remainder of the time passed with the prisoner. While topics of comfort and other subjects usual to such occasions were discussed by her companions, she was lost in thought over what her lover had said. "Someone must be found to testify to seeing John in front of the hotel." Could anyone be found? and if not, what then? Would it be possible to find a witness who could swear to seeing him there, anyway—swear falsely? De's own perceptions of the obligations of legal testimony were those of one who had been brought up to venerate existing order. A person who testified in a court of law would have, she thought with a little thrill of awe, to "kiss the book." Supposing it were herself that were called on to swear that she had seen John in front of the hotel, could she, who had not seen him, "kiss the book" and swear she had? What would the father confessor say to that? for, you know, De was a Catholic. She was still puzzling over these things when the others rose to go; and, with the look of love she had given her brother still lingering in her eyes, after the visitors had left the jail she continued to puzzle

over them until William White, noticing her preoccupation, asked the reason of it.

"Oh, nothing," said the girl, and could not be prevailed upon to explain herself further.

John Braddock's callers had been gone some time and John had returned to his cell. A voice, in his vicinity, broke the stillness of the jail,—it was that of someone evidently talking to the sheriff. It came nearer. It was the voice of Brad Simons, and through it came to the ears of the prisoner the words,

"Let me see him, sheriff. You know I mean him no harm. And I may be able to get him out of this, without any trouble."

John's attention became fixed

"Why, certainly, Brad; suppose they can't be no harm," returned the sheriff who, after all, had only seen, in the part played by Simons, the actions of a man inspired by a natural desire to bring justice to light; although Zach Stoner, the simple hearted officer, disliked Brad's relation to the case, unfortunate though that relation was

John, sitting alone upon the cot in his cell, listened to the conversation passing on the outside between Brad Simons and the sheriff. Whatever Braddock may have thought of the part taken by the grazier in the affair of his own arrest, he was, similarly with the sheriff, constrained, in an entirely dispassionate and strict view of the matter, to regard Simons as but a blind agent in the movements of justice. And so, naturally presuming the object of the cattleman to be a visit to himself, he prepared to receive Brad with perfect friendliness.

And Bradford Simons proceeded to his innings with John Braddock.

"Braddock," said the cattle dealer, after he had entered the cell, "you are as well aware as I, that I came

into this matter through no ill will to you, but, as I have once before explained, through a purely accidental discovery, on my part, of the marked bill you say Tom brought to you along with the other money paid me, when you redeemed your note. I have come to make sure that you bear me no malice."

"None, in the least, Brad—none, in the least," John Braddock answered cordially.

"John," continued Simons, who had been standing in front of Braddock, and proceeding to walk hurriedly a length of the cell, "you have relieved me more than I can tell," and in truth had John Braddock done that very thing, for Brad Simons had scant showing to win favor with De without the good will, at this conjunction of events, of De's brother.

"I believe, John, I can see a way to get you out of this mess," thoughtfully resumed Simons with his look on John.

We would be little less than human were we indifferent to proffered hope of restoration to liberty; of return to God's free air; of release from the shadow of crime and prison walls.

John Braddock was human.

"Brad," he said quickly, "what do you mean?"

"What I say," replied Simons with an air of sympathy; "but there are things that may require—"

"Come, come; let's hear," said the other, his interest keener than delay.

"John Braddock," bluntly burst forth Brad Simons, "I love your sister De."

"What has that to do with it," said the prisoner quickly, instantly scenting some ulterior design, on the part of his visitor.

"Little or nothing, perhaps," diplomatically hedged the tempter,—*"little or nothing,—it merely, that mo-*

ment,—well, you see, I do love her. I am a rich man, as you are aware, and she should never know what it was to have an ungratified wish.”

“Brad, I ask you, again, what has that to do with my case?” asked Braddock, in a composed and dignified manner.

“John,” persisted Simons, in the vein in which he had precipitated himself, “you’re not the guilty party in this case—you know that, and so do I. You know the guilty man—Tom—Tom Bolers.”

“Hush!” said young Braddock.

“Still, what I say is true,” reiterated Simons; and he, indeed, believed Nance’s brother guilty of a share in a conspiracy to murder and rob Zeke Smithin; “what’s the use!—let Tom Bolers, for once in his life, pay the penalty of his crimes.”

“Well?” said the other quietly.

“Well, help me to win your sister, and together you and I can fix this thing on Bolers;—if you don’t you stand a fair chance of going to the gallows along with a no-account, ne’er-do-well, who never did and never will amount to more than jail bird material in this world, if he ever gets anything else in the next,” and Brad Simons had had three strikes in his innings; he started for first, on what he thought was a safe hit.

He didn’t know the right fielder he had to deal with.

John Braddock caught the fly, tho’ he had to reach high to get it.

“So that’s your game, is it?” and John, as he made reply, had a vision, as well, of the loves of De and William,—“so that’s it. Well, well, I might have known better—I might have known it,” continued Braddock. “Few, it seems, if any, do things in this world without selfish motives. Now, see here, Brad,” and the speaker turned abruptly, in his turn, upon the base and un-

worthy schemer, who continued to stand and eye concentratedly the still-seated figure of the prisoner, "I am not required, by you or anyone, to state my private impressions of the guilt or the innocence of Tom Bolers or of anybody else. I am just simply a poor devil of an unfortunate, whom force of circumstances has placed in this fix, and who wants to do about as near right as God Almighty or fate, or whatever it is, will let him, and that's all; but I will say this, that I'd rather go along in an upright, honest way, trying to do as little harm to my neighbors as possible, and content with such justice as I can hope to get dealt out to me in the mercy of the All-Seeing, than to go skulking in and out of people's confidences, attempting to beguile them of their better selves, and living only to fatten selfishness upon them and theirs,—I'd rather do anything than that. I may go to the gallows, for all I know, but I'll go clean."

"You refuse to let me help you?" exploded Simons in a burst of rage.

"Upon any such terms as those that you have just proposed? yes," retorted Braddock with firm and invincible spirit.

"Then your fate be on your own head," fairly hissed the infuriated man. "John Braddock, I wash my hands of you," and Simons flung furiously from Braddock's presence and out of the jail.

Brad had had his innings and been, as we care to put it nowadays, "annexed" by the opposing team.

But loyal John had not reckoned with De, nor, of a verity, had Simons either.

And, all this time, the visitor from Kentucky was hovering between life and death.

CHAPTER XXIV

WILLIAM WHITE "GETS INTO THE GAME" AND, AT THE SAME TIME, NEAR ENOUGH INTO A FIGHT WITH BRAD SIMONS TO MAKE IT INTERESTING.

Brad Simons, grazier, farmer and onetime college man, to speak in the modern vernacular of the street, "saw his finish," in matters pertaining to love and matrimony, so long as William White stood in his way. It would be difficult, as Brad very well knew, to dislodge the literary wooer from the favor of De Braddock.

When Simons left the jail after his unsuccessful interview with John Braddock, he was in a mood to take fire at anything that continued to elaborate obstructions to the realization of his mad desire for Peter Braddock's daughter. Smarting under the merited sting of young Braddock's indignant and just repudiation of his selfish and unworthy offer, Simons, proceeding from John's place of confinement, perceived William White standing in front of the office of the attorney at law whom Uncle Peter had retained to defend his son. The cattleman crossed the street, and joined his rival and spoke to him. White replied civilly.

Brad was still nursing the embers of his jealous and vindictive hatred of this man, who had before now openly stood between the cattleman and De Braddock.

"White," began Simons, in a seemingly friendly manner, "you've been a pretty good soldier."

"I've done the best I could, Brad," rejoined the one armed ex-military man.

"Don't you, sometimes, feel as if you'd like to have another little brush with the enemy?" said Simons, with a mean glitter in his eye, and edging closer to White.

"No, I've had my share of fighting," said White unsuspectingly,—“I don't believe I want any more.”

"True, you don't care to fight much, do you?" smoothly retorted the other man, eying his unsuspecting companion evilly.

William White, still unconscious of any hidden meaning in Brad's speech, looked down at the armless sleeve on his own right side and up again, with smiling significance, into his companion's face.

"I'm not in a very good shape to try it, Brad," he returned laughingly.

Simons observed the first look.

"True,—too bad about your arm," continued he, still preserving an air of apparently friendly concern, and indicating the empty sleeve of the ex-army man, "or you might do a little fighting, even yet, on occasion.

White said he regretted his soldierly disability.

"Oh, I don't know," pursued Simons; "guess you weren't very sorry to get out of danger."

The ex-soldier glanced, a second time, and quickly into the speaker's face. Something in Simons' remark finally jarred upon him; but, at the instant, he could not tell whether it was a slur upon his courage or not, and he remained silent, gazing passively into Brad Simons' half laughing countenance. Perhaps, Simons was joking. It never occurred to White to suppose that the man was trying to fasten a quarrel upon him. White's courage was not questioned by those who knew him.

"Say, William," continued the cattle dealer abruptly, as though the idea had just occurred to him, "with that arm, or want of one, you ought to go in for congress.

They might overlook general unfitness, and take you for the soldier business." Simons was still smiling, and it was even now impossible to determine whether he was ridiculing the one-armed man, or whether he was indulging in a humor which, to say the least, was in very questionable taste, or whether he was really serious.

White deemed it best, at this point, to remark without emotion of any kind,

"I expect they would have to overlook a good many things in both you and me, Brad, in the selections of merit and worth," and the writer, in his turn, smiled good naturedly

"Very good—very good," laughed Simons loudly and affectedly; "I suspect they might even overlook your literature," and Brad Simons continued to laugh with apparently even greater good nature, and in seemingly increased appreciation of his own wit.

William White, on his side, likewise laughed good humoredly.

"It would be a severe test of the forbearance of the suffragists of this district, I don't doubt," said the literary man, entering complacently into the conceit of his companion.

"Frankly," continued Simons assuming a manner of confidential concern, "I don't suppose, at all events, that you much object to anything—one arm, or anything else—so long as you are let stay at home with 'The girl you left behind you,' and spend your time laying around with old Braddock's daughter," and Brad laughed again.

"Mr. Simons," replied William White, made suddenly conscious that Simons had invaded ground of sacred privacy—a ground on which this man, now standing before him, and himself could never meet in the troubled motives and instincts unhappily urging Simons

on,—“Mr. Simons,” repeated William White, “it is to be hoped that you fully measure the meaning of all you are saying. I feel regret to add, however, that your last observation and, in fact, the prolonged jest upon my missing arm, are in poor taste.”

If Brad Simons’ intention was to precipitate hostility between himself and De’s lover, this was his opportunity. He, too, was no coward. It might have been more politic to avoid an open quarrel with his rival; but few stop to think when their animosity is aroused, and Brad’s was to a passionate and implacable degree!

Trouble was averted, for the moment, by the appearance upon the sidewalk, where the two belligerents were standing, of Benjamin Grigseomb, the lawyer of lynching fame, whom Farmer Braddock had employed in the defense of John, and who now came from his office in front of which Brad Simons and William White had been standing, and addressed the two in terms of friendly greeting. The lawyer had caught White’s reference to his missing arm.

“Billy,” said Grigseomb, “they say you can do as much with that one arm of yours as an ordinary man can with two.”

“I’ve just been trying to convince my friend, here, of his loss in respect of the prospect of a little skirmish,” said Simons, unable to resist the malicious impulse to give his adversary a sly and as he thought a safe thrust.

“I expect,” remarked White in his quietest and best manner, “that Mr. Simons is not advised how near this skirmish is at hand, or how gladly I shall meet the odds or accept the advantages attempted to be taken of a one armed man.” White concluded his remark smilingly.

“I say, Grigseomb,” exclaimed Brad Simons turning hastily to the attorney, “it may be possible I am on the

track of an *alibi* for John Braddock, whatever is the guilt or innocence of the other man Bolers."

"Evidence of such a nature," replied the lawyer, earnestly and unreservedly, "would be very acceptable—vital, Simons. Do you mean—?"

"I don't know exactly what I mean, just now," interrupted Simons, "but I have heard of someone who is thought to know something," went on Brad non-committally; "and, as you are sure of my interest, Grigscomb, in your client, you can feel perfectly safe that I will find the party, if it is possible, or she—he exists," Brad completed his sentence in some confusion, and glanced searchingly at White. His manner, however, passed unnoticed by his companions.

"Can't you tell me the name? We'll summons the witness," persisted Grigscomb.

"The trouble is, I don't know," returned Brad, who evidently had his own reasons, at this instant, for interjecting the element of a scheme of *alibi* for John Braddock into the situation.

"I don't mind telling you, Simons, that the kind of evidence you have alluded to might save the life or liberty of our friend John Braddock," impressively observed Lawyer Grigscomb, "so you will not neglect to keep us advised?"

"I expect," rejoined the cattleman evasively, "to know more in a day or two. You can look to hear from me, then."

"Well, Brad," said the attorney familiarly, "don't keep us waiting too long," and with that the topic rested. "And, now, gentlemen, in my office, I have some unusually fine—ahem!—" coughed the lawyer discreetly,—“will you join me?"

Both Brad Simons and William White declined the implied invitation to drink with the hospitably inclined

barrister, White thanking the lawyer politely, and Simons supplementing his own declination with,

“Next time, Grigscomb—next time.”

“Gentlemen,” then said the counsellor affably, “I wish you both a pleasant good day,” and moved off.

Simons and White left standing alone eyed each other pretty much as two gladiators might be supposed to do while waiting for an unguarded moment, on the part of the adversary, in which to begin an attack. White saw clearly, now, that Simons had deliberately provoked an encounter. It was as easy for the one-armed soldier to perceive the cause of his enemy’s hostility. The writer determined for De’s sake to have no quarrel which, in any way, could ever be said to have been begun on her account. While White stood carefully regarding the face of the man before him, Brad Simons’ thoughts were, also, busy.

The latter had been given time, during the course of Lawyer Grigscomb’s restraining presence, to see, in cooler moments, the folly and impolitic mistake of engaging in a street fight with White, as much on account of the usual unamiable notoriety of such a proceeding as on account of the disadvantage he himself would labor under, in the popular judgment, in having forced an altercation upon a maimed man.

In a low voice William White spoke:

“I think this matter has gone far enough. I’m sure you do. I am going over to the hotel.”

“I guess,” returned Bradford Simons, “I’ll be going the other way.”

“I hope we part as friends,” said White.

“Oh, yes,” replied Simons, with a peculiar, hard look on his face; “yes, of course,—friends, of course.”

“Good day,” said White, and crossed the street.

"Good day," said Simons, remaining stationary, and gazing in silence after the retiring figure.

As the departing writer reached the opposite side of the way, the cattleman continued to gaze after him. Without removing his eyes from White's receding form, and much as if he were driving his own cattle and steers into the shambles and had one especially selected for vindictive slaughter, he ejaculated hoarsely under his breath,

"Damn you!"

CHAPTER XXV.

BOB LIKKUM MAKES AN APPOINTMENT UNDER RATHER CURIOUS AND UNEXPECTED CIRCUMSTANCES.

While Brad Simons was approaching a state promising its own kind of troubles for William White, the picturesque Smoky Billings was entertaining, with the most praiseworthy and well meaning intentions, a purpose affording a prospect of an equal and unlimited amount of unrest for the literary and former military character. Mr. Billings was endeavoring to inspire Bob Likkum with the notion that, in White, was the future savior of the political destinies of a common and benighted land. In other words, as Smoky put it, "Mister White ought to go to congress." This extraordinary outburst of good will, and extreme of grateful and lasting appreciation of the happily unconscious William were enthusiastically prompted by the undoubted and deserved kindness with which the writer had treated the former tramp; now comfortably employed, through William White's good offices, at White's boarding place. (The finances of White had been much restricted by the foreclosure of the mortgage on his farm—an event resulting from the bank robbery—and he had very little of his own to offer his faithful admirer and friend. A small sum in cash was all that yet remained to the struggling writer; and the hopes of future success with his pen spelled the rest.) When Billings first proposed "Billy" for preferment to the inconceivable heights of congressional honors, Mr. Likkum received the idea with

a profoundly skeptical view. "What could a feller with yaller hair an' a po'try writin' gift do where things hed ter be done?" was Robert's sage comment. It next struck the country humorist, that things were not always done in congress to such an extent as to cause much loss of sleep, on the part of the doers; and, in that saving grace of the case, it might, after all, be just the sort of tremendous exertion to which "Billy" was especially adapted. Though Likkum had no ill will to "the literary genius," but rather liked the latter personally, this last conclusion seemed to offer to the comedian the natural settlement of two hopeless questions. So, without much serious thought one way or the other, Bob Likkum was the first to good naturedly promise support of Smoky Billings' candidate. It could not possibly have been foreseen what farreaching and important sequel was to conclude the half humorous and half slighting consideration given this suggested representation of their interests at Washington.

Jason Jump had already been outspoken for Benjamin Grigscomb to represent the party opposed to that of the foregoing group of political workers, and with which Jump, although comparatively a newcomer in that congressional district and in the state, had succeeded in effectively connecting himself. The instincts which inspired this last named and rebellious soldier of fortune made him particularly hostile to those things of civil life which William White espoused with all the ardor of a dreamer and an idealist, a poet and a scholar; and the naturally keen and penetrating mind of the once country editor, sharpened by its merciless and astounding clash with the existing forces of the day, contrary to Bob Likkum's estimate of White, instantly appraised at its true value the intelligence, honesty and conscience in the soldier and writer—here was a man who, even Jason

Jump knew, would, were he ever placed where such service could be successfully performed, fearlessly and capably serve the people and his country. Jason Jump had needed such service once himself; but, having been in, what seemed to him, a manner hopelessly turned into the present bitter course of reprisal, he stood, in his own perverted and melancholy sense, irretrievably committed—he no longer lived in nor breathed the atmosphere of the old political days, save in its corruption, and failed to accurately estimate the virtue of his surroundings save in its antagonism to the law of retaliation. Heads that opposed him were made to knock, and this he proposed to do whenever and wherever he found them. It had been made, by his persecutors and betrayers, his mission to get the better of government, law and human society.

So far as Bob Likkum was concerned, had he fully understood subsequent events affecting criminal control of the ballot and the interests of his neighbors in governmental concerns in his vicinity, that doubting though genial humorist and critic would, as soon as another, have arrayed himself on the side of anyone promising hope of relief from the despotism of corrupt and enslaving politicians. Evil and designing men had no place in Likkum's list of workers in the vineyard. In what followed Smoky Billings' earnest and sincere introduction of his benefactor into the political affairs of that locality, Robert Likkum and, indeed, many others of a formerly skeptical and depreciating view of literature as a practical means of benefiting the material interests of a community were destined to receive a new and valuable addition to their substantial stock of knowledge.

Jason Jump's own position, and that of his kind, singularly enough was the first to give a serious impetus to the idea of running White for a seat in the national house of representatives. The uncompromising hostility

of Jump and his associates gave Likkum and those of his class their first realization of William White's value and merit. Jump, served by his adherents political and otherwise through a species of fear which the unscrupulous leader had lost no time in inspiring them with, was correspondingly disliked and distrusted by those to whom he was opposed; and, to the "best meaning element," he afforded an object of complete, thorough and unqualified opposition. With Benjamin Grigscomb as his candidate,—a demagogue who, though a successful practitioner of the law, was a tricky, shift and unreliable factor in the varied affairs and interests of his region,—Jason Jump had made considerable headway towards the success of his design to control the political fortunes of the congressional district in which destiny had cast his own lot. It is not apparent, in any way, that Grigscomb by direct complicity, was allied with the unsavory doings of the instruments of revenge employed by the outlaw leader in the members of his criminal organization; but Jump and others who knew Benjamin Grigscomb felt, at all times, confident in an appeal to the crafty lawyer's legal talents, where any interest requiring rescue from lawless consequences was at stake.

William White early disclaimed responsibility for Billings' advocacy of the writer as a possible national representative and, while manifesting a disposition to spare Smoky's feelings, announced himself as having no ambition for congress. He laughed good naturedly at a revival, by Brad Simons, of the latter's jesting remarks concerning the forbearance of the district in the matter of the writer's literary productions; and met Bob Likkum's well meaning and humorous sallies as to the worthlessness of literature and congress collectively and in particular, with the greatest possible relish and jolly

good fellowship. He knew Jump but slightly; and, when that wily campaigner approached the literary man with the appearance of a serious acceptance of the latter's reported bearing to a future congressional nomination, White was more impressed with the implied mark of present personal consideration, than he was with any thoughts of future national selection.

"You would make a good race, Mr. White," sincerely observed Jason Jump. Jump reasoned that, had White a serious following, his nomination would supply a most formidable candidate, in principle and war record; but, having heard the light and flippant manner in which the subject of any political connection of the writer was referred to, he felt equally satisfied that the native strength and inherent personal desirability of William White would be lost.

White, once more, politely expressed himself as properly sensible of Mr. Jump's compliment; but was correspondingly reserved as to any other issue present or to come.

The freebooter chieftain, out of disguise, perceived that "his man" was conscious of the jocular meaning of the principals of the latter's "party friends(?);" and the astute politician, sharpened by the faculty of the editor, saw another danger: Should White, by his natural self respect, be able to hold out against being placed in a false position, his real worth, by some accident, might express itself, become recognized and finally erect an insurmountable barrier to the outlaw. Slightly disconcerted, the manager of Benjamin Grigscomb's congressional interests coughed a little behind his hand, looked at his watch, and was about to pretend an engagement when, at this moment, the two were joined by Brad Simons. William White instinctively felt that a tense and imminent danger of some kind had suddenly

found a missing link, and was drawing its deadly coils about him, relentlessly and surely . . . He glanced casually around. The action showed, standing a short distance away near the public square of T——, the figures of Bob Likkum and Smoky Billings, in amiable and social companionship. Not far from these stood Unele Peter Braddock, just starting, however, to move away. A few others were scattered about, chatting, gossiping and idling their time away. His glance was observed by Simons as well as Jason Jump.

“Oh,” laughed Simons, “not now, White. Caesar will not get it, this time, in the forum.”

The ex-soldier, by an intuition, looked quickly from Brad to Jump to see what understanding existed between the two men, and caught the briefest flash of intelligence pass from one to the other. Without turning, he became conscious of Likkum and Smoky Billings sauntering toward him. Should he, at that moment, be in danger of a personal attack from Simons, for some reason and in some way aided and abetted by Jump, he, at least, had the satisfaction of seeing tried friends at hand.

“Caesar,” said White, “was done to death, in the public place, by *friends*.”

“Politically,” smiled Brad Simons, “you are in the hands of yours.”

“I am,” returned the object of the other’s wit, “and,” added significantly, “will put Antony to work before, instead of after, taking.”

Bob Likkum and Smoky Billings, at that instant, joined the three.

“What’s the yarn?” asked Bob. “You fellers look ’s if ye’d seen Humpty Dumpty,” this illustration seeming, to Bob’s view, as expressive, in humorous irony, of the appearances of the faces of those he had just joined;

for their countenances were set and stern. William White had put into his final speech a note of preparation for the struggle to come between himself and the forces of the cattleman and Jason Jump, that had brought a consciousness and anticipation to the breasts of all.

"Your man's a threat," cried Simons gaily, "and a menace, with his sharp steel pen, to the nation's fortresses on the towering heights above you!"

"Aw, come off yer perch," growled Likkum. "What yo' givin' us?"

"He'll make a better man 'n yours, if he'll run," said Billings, without excitement, but edging in a little as he spoke.

"'A Daniel come to judgement!'" exclaimed Simons. "A rival political manager, Jump."

But Grigscomb's "boss" knew politics, and said nothing. Sincerity, wherever found, is a powerful and, in the long long run, usually unconquerable ally; and Brad's accomplice was quick to discover sincerity in the words of Smoky Billings.

"Say, Simons," drawled Bob Likkum who, now that he saw the drift of Brad's stinging and insulting innuendoes, was up in arms not only for the "under dog in the fight," but for "Billy" personally, "I don't think much o' Grigscomb, do you?"

"He has a recognized place of practical use in the community," replied Simons, impersonally.

"You mean Billy, here, hain't," said Likkum. "Huh!"

"I don't say," said Brad, shifting his look from the face of Smoky Billings, where it had been resting, and allowing it to sweep past White to Likkum's resolved and composed visage.

"That's whut ye mean, though," retorted Bob, very quietly and determinedly pressing home.

"Take it, then, as you please, Likkum," calmly rejoined Bob's adversary, without removing his eyes from Likkum's.

"He's a friend o' mine," said White's champion.

"Is he?" said Simons with a sneer.

"Yes, an' a better man than you er Grigscomb ever dared be."

"What do you mean?" scowled the cattleman.

"Whut I say," said the other quietly. Likkum waited a moment. "You heerd me?" Bob said.

"You— you and your coming distinguished representative," looking at White,—“bah!” ejaculated Simons, abruptly breaking off; “you—the whole lot of you—ain't worth wasting time on.”

"William White was a brave soldier," replied Likkum composedly; "and you're a damned liar."

Brad Simons struck a quick, short arm blow, that the speaker dodged. The others interfered. Jason Jump, recognizing prudence, without a word led Simons firmly away, and thus put a final end to the controversy.

At the same time, "Me an' Billy," called Bob Likkum, "'ll meet ye, any time, an' glad ter see ye, to Washington, in his congrurshunal headquarters," and Robert Likkum was out for William White for congress.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SMOKY BILLINGS DREAMS A DREAM.

"It can be did," Bob Likkum said emphatically to Smoky Billings. "I *tell* ye it kin." Likkum's fighting blood was aroused, after his encounter with Brad Simons; and now he was determined that his friend William White should not only have the race for congress, but be elected as well. The chances were generally against the party that White, should he accept a nomination, would represent; but, to offset this, Bob's man, at a time when it counted for much, had the prestige of a good record in the Civil War. "I'm a delegate," said Robert, "to that 'air convention; an' I think Billy kin be nomy-nated."

If anything could have raised the speaker in Smoky Billings' estimation, this unqualified espousal of the cause of William White would have had that effect; but Bob Likkum, as a local political influence of considerable importance, already enjoyed not only a fair share of Smoky's approval but the respect and confidence, as well, of all who knew him. It was not necessary, therefore, to bid for Smoky Billings' favor in the case of the doughty humorist.

"That pirate Brad Simons," rejoined Billings, "'ll get his craft raked fore and aft, afore we git through with him." The ex-sailor was, by this time, in some of "that pirate's" secrets, in a way, had the pirate been informed, that would have caused the black flag of his free sailing vessel to flutter and shake with certain pre-

monitory symptoms of panic before suffering itself to be ignominiously hauled down. In other words, Smoky had not been idle; "had it in for" Mr. Simons, and that latter misguided gentleman had better look out.

"Did ye see Peter Braddock over there, jes' now?" casually inquired Likkum, directing attention to the public square, whence he and Billings had but recently come.

White had gone over to the bank, and Bob and Smoky had remained on the scene of the late encounter with Jason Jump and Brad Simons.

Smoky Billings looked around at the place where, but a moment since, Braddock had stood. The latter had moved away, and Likkum's companion let his gaze travel down the country street. "There he goes inter the post office, now," said Billings.

"Hi, Peter," called Bob. Peter Braddock turned, and Bob hurried over to meet him.

Smoky Billings was left alone.

Smoky was but a common sort of a fellow, after all; and, so, when he saw De and Mother Braddock coming out of a store, where they had been doing their buying, he felt a kind of shrinking up, for he had not, since the lynching experience,—and, of course, never before,—seen De under circumstances where he felt he might be privileged to actually speak to, maybe touch the hand, breathe the same atmosphere of, his divinity. He trembled at the thought. She was so beautiful, so young, so enthralling to his every sense. And he felt that he might save this spirit of another world from a fate as threatening as that from which she had rescued him, when writhing in the merciless and deadly clutches of the mob. De was coming toward him. His impulse was to turn and flee; but he was held to the spot. Mother Braddock, with a word to the girl, entered another store; and

De passed on, bent upon an errand of her own. Smoky watched her. Something fascinated him. He had a fear of constant danger surrounding her. She might find herself in some coil of Simons' devising, at any moment. When the object of his solicitude had passed out of sight, around a corner of the old red brick courthouse, Billings suddenly shook himself together and started after her. They might run White for congress, and do anything else they cared to do; but, hereafter, De Braddock was to have a guardian who never slept, who never thought of reward, who never rested or ate, without knowing, in some way, that she was safe and secure in her virgin life. It was a beautiful thing to see the rough sailorman, with his rolling gait and bulky figure, plowing the main in the wake of the delicate little clipper built form of his idol.

"Rope's end me!" thought Smoky Billings; "what port 's she bound for, now, I wonder?"

De kept on her way, ignorant of the larger vessel under whose convoy she was sailing into the peaceful waters of Father O'Gorman's haven. As she stopped at the rectory and entered, the man in her rear took from his pocket a well smoked pipe; filled it; lit it; smoked, and waited like a patient dog (if dogs smoke outside the pages of "Mother Goose"), until his self assumed charge reappeared. When, after a spell of waiting on Smoky's part, she came forth, De seemed much absorbed; doubtless having come from a visit for priestly consolation, in her sore trouble about John. She did not seem to notice the form of a man, who was quietly smoking on the opposite side of the way; and proceeded hurriedly,—for mother would be expecting her return,—to make her way into the outskirts of the small town, where was the dwelling place of Miss Primvale, here former teacher. It was getting along toward the middle of the afternoon,

and the long drive home had yet to be made. There were, in her present way, bits of open fields to pass; and ramshackle, tumbledown buildings, barns and miscellaneous evidences of unsettled and abandoned living places. Past this, a little ways, was Miss Primvale's. De was of a fearless nature, totally without cowardice of any kind. She would face anything from a spider or a mouse to an unbroken horse or a mob of lynchers.

"See here, my fine lady," said a voice, breaking in on her rapid, self absorbed walk, "ye look fu'st class;—I jes' think I'll take a bite."

De looked around, with a swift, contained manner. She saw, without before perceiving her locality, that she had come abreast, in a lonely spot, of a dilapidated, disused stable. Out of this had issued the figure of a man, wearing a piece of black cloth across his eyes, which now gleamed with terrifying light through holes of vision. The woman did not scream.

"I am going on," she said, with no abatement of her gait.

"Now, sweetheart, I don't think ye be," chuckled her waylayer.

De said nothing and hastened her steps. The ruffian, with a stride, was at her side.

"Why, birdie," he exclaimed, encircling her with his arm, "without a—?" he got no further. Someone sprang into the road from the unfenced field in which the barn stood; and, with a groan, the would-be violator, beneath a crushing blow, fell heavily to the earth. The rescued girl stood gazing into the resolute and illuminated countenance of Smoky Billings.

"Oh, I'm so glad," cried De.

"So — so be I, miss," simply replied the man.

"Just in time," said the girl, breathing quickly.

"Jest about the right time," assured the sailor,

swinging a mortal-looking club above the prostrate form of De's assailant, as the latter stirred from the unsparing blow Smoky had dealt him, a moment before.

"Oh, let him go," urged De.

"Miss," said Smoky, even at this moment letting himself thrill beneath the wonderful eyes he saw looking into his, "I think it's best not."

"Oh, do," in her pleading, insisted the other. "He did no harm. You — you," she added, "I believe, are the poor fellow they tried to lynch."

Still thrilling in the beams of supernal glow emanating from something he conceived to be eyes, Smoky admitted that such pleasure was his.

"Pleasure?" wonderingly questioned De.

The figure on the earth groaned dismally.

"Yes, miss, for you saved me."

"Oh," and in spite of herself, the blush that crept over her face testified to her smiling confusion.

Smoky gave it up. He was down and out. If he could only die for her!

"And your name is — is — Billings, I believe?" said De.

"Sich they calls me," said the man, hat in hand, — "Smoky Billings."

"I am going into the house, there. If you care to wait about, Mr. Billings," said De, "you — you," glancing at the man on the ground, — "you might see me back to town, if you would."

Would he!

"Will you wait?"

The man said he would, and once more gave it up! It was all he could do.

And De was gone.

Billings stirred the thing at his feet with the toe of his boot. "Git up," he said.

The defeated ruffian opened his eyes.

"Git up," repeated Smoky.

The other struggled to his feet, uncertainly.

"Git out," said Billings, with a kick that sent the fellow staggering ten feet away.

And he got.

What Mother Braddock would have done when she heard of the outrage to which her daughter had been subjected, had she, at that moment, had her hands on the perpetrator, would far outstrip the impatient desire to tell. And, of a truth, Peter Braddock, as became him, grew grave in the telling Martha of these dangers of which he had before reminded her. The country, without success, was scoured for the offender; and Smoky said nothing about his deliberately releasing the miscreant at someone's "slightest wish and pleasure."

Smoky was in a dream, certain rapt portions of which kept sacredly to himself none other might ever know; but other suggestions from that dreaming state communicated themselves to William White, with whom Billings lost no time in conferring. The seafaring beneficiary of the literary man had drawn closer and closer to De's lover who, at last, found it an unrestricted and grateful privilege to discuss with the faithful and devoted subject of De Braddock's rescue from the lynch-ers the general ground of his own apprehension concerning the part the outlaws must have in De's life, owing to the singular nature of the broken utterances of Rachel Bolers — words that had resulted in having White forcibly conveyed to the outlaws' cave.

"If it's her 'at needs the secrets uv them murderers of the high seas," said Smoky Billings, "they'll give 'em up to me, an' their cave, an' all they've got. God Almighty, Mr. White, couldn't keep me back."

"I don't think he'll try, Smoky," said White, smiling.

"You're the only one 'at's good enough fur 'er," pursued the impassioned friend of De Braddock and William White.

"Better leave that out," rejoined the other.

"We'll elect ye both fur congress," continued the irrepressible Billings, with an ecstatic wave of his hand.

"And so you think one wouldn't be enough to punish?" suggested White, mildly.

"Not near enough," grinned Smoky.

"Well, we'll see," replied the menaced writer, simply. "But, Smoky, if we don't look sharp, we'll have no congress for anybody, so far as — she is concerned."

Technical nautical language referring to the eyes and limbs and other portions of the anatomy of the outlaws, and being recorded in the speech of White's resolved friend, but unsuitable for publication, expressed a determination, on the part of Smoky Billings, to thwart the evil intentions of those conspiring against De Braddock's peace and safety, or very cheerfully, eagerly, gladly die in the attempt, day or night, through all eternity!

"Billings," said William White, soberly, still recalling the experiences of the cave and Rachel Bolers' use of Simons' name, "Brad Simons is mixed up in this pursuit of — her?"

"It wa'n't Simons 'at waylaid 'er," hastily supplied Billings. "That I *knows*." Smoky pinched his nose and himself into a state of profound thoughtfulness, and bored his employer's eyes with a continual and intent speculation in his own twinkling, keen and shrewd ones.

"That may be, but his influence is either felt or she is, otherwise, in the greatest danger from him."

"Ain't any doubt about it, at all," said Smoky.

“And none, that we’ll uncover him?”

“None, at all,” proclaimed White’s man, emphatically, with a picture of his beloved divinity De Braddock, in his soul, waving, as an angel of beauty and light, him on ahead!

Without, in the night, the distant whippoorwill called to its mate; and a nightingale, finding rest on its pilgrimage, in a glade nearby, gurgled its bright love song to the woods and heart of solitude.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BILLINGS AND SIMONS (LIMITED), FURNISHERS OF
INTERESTING AND EXCITING NEWS.

The evening of the day on which Uncle Peter and party had gone to T—— to look after the Kentucky relative, saw the familiar Braddock red wagon returning to the farm. The country vehicle had arrived opposite Widow Walmsey's, when a sudden stoppage of the homeward bound company occurred. Widow Walmsey was at her gate, manifesting, through various complicated signals, a wish to "speak" Uncle Peter's vessel. This latter outfit, upon coming to a halt and being relieved of the rattle and clank of laboring machinery, was hailed by the friendly ship, which Uncle Peter was about "to pass in the night," with,

"Do tell me, Uncle Peter, what 'bout your relation Hiram? Same as I met, that time, at your house, ain't he? Is he much sick? Was it him? Did you bring him along? Say—? And John?"

To what further length these few inquiries directed in the search of knowledge, by the fair widow, would have continued, had not interruption transpired, would be impossible to say. As it was, the fat farmboy Esau, at this instant, announced from the front seat of the red wagon, in a flat and dogmatic tone,

"There's Job Sa'nders to the winder," the effect of which speech presented to the minds of those upon the premises the view of a gentleman of Mr. "Sa'nders'" personal appearance very leisurely displaying himself,

within, at the widow's front window, between lamp light and the outer deepening night. He was regaling himself with a flagon of refreshing beverage of sort unknown to the assembled spectators; and which goodly drink thriving Job is surmised to have obtained, and strolled to the aforesaid window to consume and witness the proceedings going on without at one and the same time.

"Well," retorted Uncle Peter, allowing his pent up disgust with the guileless Esau to find sudden and explosive vent, "what if it is, ye booby?"

"Ain't no booby, nuther," replied Esau in a world of offense.

"Ye ought to be in a loonytic 'sylum, there's where ye ought to be," asserted the judicial minded Uncle Peter.

"Oughtn't," stoutly denied the farmboy, — "ye knows I oughtn't," persisted Esau, as though prevention of the instant confinement of his fat person in the nearest retreat for the afflicted in mind depended solely upon the character of defense the said Esau could make, that night, in the red wagon halted in the open highway.

"Durned ef I don't think ye ought," added Uncle Peter, with a last touch of decision. — "Bad, Mis' Walmsley," continued the reprover of Esau; "ye see, Hiram's thought to be pooty close onto nowhere, 't all," and the old Hoosier removed his hat, and passed a hand over his suit of thick, iron gray hair.

"Ye mean," said the widow in a tone of solicitude, "that —?"

"Yes, widder, ain't much chanst of his pullin' through. Guess I'll go down, ag'in, in the mornin'. As fur John, widder, the Lord is our stay!"

"Mighty sorry, Uncle Peter," in a voice of compas-

sionate sympathy, said Mrs. Walmsey, “ ’bout Hiram, an’ the Lord be good to ye ’bout John!”

“Yes, I know ye be,” simply replied the farmer, from the wagon, “an’ amen.”

It was this touch of sympathy and consideration among these country folk that gave a simple genuineness to their characters; and, at all times, rendered them helpful and neighborly in the true spirit of community.

“Won’t you — all on you — git down, a minute?” asked the widow who, without, in any way be it hoped, impairing, in the minds of the reader, the sincere quality of her hospitality, it will yet have to blushing be confessed extended her invitation not without giving a fleeting and regretful thought to the loss of certain vagrant though highly proper charms of solitary enjoyment in the society of one Job Saunders then waiting within the house,—“do, now,—come, Marthy, do get out.”

White had already descended from the wagon, having, in arriving at the widow’s door, reached his own abiding place.—The widow was poor, and the writer’s small board money was a boon to her.—William White very earnestly joined his landlady in her invitation to the farmer’s party to tarry for a moment. The perfume of the sweet smelling honeysuckle, at the corner of the house, added its subtle and alluring breath.

Uncle Peter had hesitated; when White’s additional solicitations increased the former’s inability to decide this passing question of natural relaxation.

“Mother, what d’ ye say?” propounded the farmer.

“Jus’ ez you say, Peter,” was Mother Braddock’s conclusion,—“ef you feel like it.”

There was certainly a waste of deliberations in respect of one member of the red-wagon party, for White had taken De’s hand, and the rare maid already stood

appropriately close to the side of William in the roadway.

There was no longer any demur and the visitors entered Mrs. Walmsey's cozy parlor.

Job Saunders received with anything but satisfaction the entrance into Widow Walmsey's home of the Braddock contingent; and sulked, off and on, in a corner, for the balance of the evening, indulging beneath his breath in profanity enough to have set the ears of the simple and goodly company tingling till doomsday.

"There are others," however; and Brad Simons, at a discreet distance, following the Braddock farm wagon from T——, and seeing the same empty itself in front of Widow Walmsey's door, like an overburdened carry-all sensible of its opportunity to rest,—Brad Simons is here; and another of increasing importance in our narrative is here, likewise,—Mr. Smoky Billings is here. In fine, the firm of furnishers of interesting and exciting news, Messrs. Billings and Simons (limited), has arrived.

As Mrs. Walmsey passed into the house with the others, she was overheard to say, in a manner of natural consideration obtaining in the country for horses and cattle of all kind, and addressing the words to William White, who was just in advance of her:

"If the horses want anything, William, will you have that Smoky man of yours attend to them?"

William White, in yielding to his original impulse of interest in Billings, had employed him, or assisted in causing his employment, on the premises of the Widow Walmsey. It is but fair and just to Smoky to say, that, in the humble duties of the modest establishment of the widow, he had shown himself perfectly trustworthy and reliable. His compensation was not large, and of the small remuneration White satisfied the greater portion. Billings' demands consisted chiefly of sufficient clotling

to protect him from exposure to the elements, and enough food to save him from privations of appetite, the last named provision, together with a shelter, being the only part the widow was obliged to sustain in the expense of Smoky's employment. The question of shelter, of course, put the straightened circumstances of Mrs. Wahnsey to no additional charge; and Smoky Billings' healthy Indiana appetite was carefully and guardedly watched, by William, who secretly stood ready to indemnify the widow, in this latter respect, should occasion require.

As Simons approached the gate, Billings came out into the road to observe the new arrival and, in the darkness, by closer inspection, determine his identity. At the same time, Esau, late mentally denounced by Uncle Peter, was busying himself at the heads of the horses.

"Good evening, friend," saluted Simons, from horseback, as the cattleman perceived the now neatly attired figure of Billings, but failing in the gloom to recognize the former tramp.

"Evenin'," responded Billings. "Cast anchor and land?" asked Smoky, with an affable turn of nautical phraseology.

"What's that?" said Simons, for a moment puzzled by the oddity of the fellow's form of speech.

"Get off and hitch," said Smoky.

"Oh!" replied the grazier. "Think I shall," and Simons proceeded to dismount from his horse. "Ah," said he, as his feet touched the road, "it's you, is it?" and the cattle raiser gazed into the features of Smoky Billings, familiar to him from the day of the picnic. "How 'd *you* get here?" inquired Brad Simons.

"The fairies didn't pilot me, neither did the angels," stolidly rejoined Billings; "'but,' as the feller says,

'I've arriv'.' How 'd *you* come?" The question was put by the speaker in such a tone of seemingly innocent inquiry, that, at first, it struck Simons with no sense of unusual or personal liberty. After a second of time, however, it entered his mind, that such a query had no special bearing upon the proprieties of his reception at the hands of the apparently unconscious party leading the stock merchant's horse to the hitch rail. He, therefore, called out in a weak, though astonished voice,

"What's that to you?"

"Thought it might mean about the same as my bein' here meant to you," replied the man, with an admirable appearance of innocence and candor.

"You did, did you?" half growled Simons. "Well, my comings and goings have no part in your business, do you hear?" said the cattel dealer loudly.

"Couldn't help hearin' yer hail, mister," said Smoky, with easy indifference; "but," added the man to himself, "I don't know about my havin' no part in your log book. Maybe," said Billings aloud and with aggravating calmness, "you'd like to hire me, when you got anything to do,—you might give me a odd job or two."

"See here, bring back that horse,—or," ejaculated Brad, striding up, "I'll hitch my own horse. You seem a little too busy, *here*,"—the cattleman reached for his horse's bridle,—"and impertinent enough, at that."

"That's about correct, mister," said Smoky, ignoring the last of Simons' retort, and proceeding, with the utmost composure, to complete the hitching of Simons' horse,—"that's what I am—kept pretty busy here—have been ever since you had that 'ere talk with your housekeeper, that time."

"What do you mean?" gasped Brad, whose breath was suddenly taken through this intimation, on Billings' part, of a knowledge of his private affairs.

"Oh, nothin'," answered the man. He completed the fastening of Brad's horse to the hitching rail; and, having shown no concern in voice or manner, turned, with a similarly undisturbed and satisfied deportment, to where the farmboy was just finishing like services for Peter Braddock's team. "Say, you side of a barn,"—this indecorous though, in no way, ill meant speech being delivered, by Smoky Billings, to the subject of Farmer Braddock's recent views as to the need of a lunatic asylum—the much abused Esau.

The farmboy, with becoming dignity, wished to know if his ears had heard aright in gathering that Mr. Billings had addressed him as a "side of a barn."

"That's what's o'clock, my hearty," retorted the extramp cheerily. "Stir around, or you'll take root," the last to further animate the farmboy, who had paused in an attitude of freezing scorn. "Have you got them hosses all right?"

This free and easy address, on the part of Smoky Billings, conveying, in the last question, a suggestion of doubt as to the farmboy's professional capacity in the care of horses, and coming from an, heretofore, unheard of "nobody" in such vocations, added to the ignominy of being called a "side of a barn," was too much for the farmboy. With a look of withering scorn, tempered by a polite contempt, Esau turned from Smoky and, in proper silence, would have left that easy going gentleman hopelessly frizzling beneath his disdain, but for the humane and harmonizing arrival of William White.

White, at this crisis, appearing with a lantern, handed the same to the fat boy, remarking,

"Esau, you and Smoky get water for these horses."

Simons had bottled his own wrath; and, to whatever effect the meaning of Billings' remarks relating to Simons' housekeeper had extended, kept his own counsel

respecting that burst of confidence from White's factotum. Deigning no further notice of the impenetrable road artist, he proceeded into the house.

The scene presented within Widow Walmsey's cheerful, lamp lit parlor was one of quiet interest and repose, with the exception of a show of despondent and melancholy sentimentality, which oozed from the pores of the heart stricken Job Saunders, and which was intensified every time Job looked up at the tall, old fashioned clock standing by the widow's parlor door, and noted the lapse of those precious moments which he had come prepared to spend in the widow's exclusive society.

Simons approached De.

"I have," said he, in a low tone, as he reached her side, "something to say concerning your brother. Will you hear it?"

The wish farthest from De's heart, at any other time, would have been to have communication with this man. After the meeting in Ann Mariah's garden, she had dismissed as unworthy of further consideration one who could act as Simons did, that day. But circumstances had altered since then. She did not hesitate, and replied that she would hear him.

Simons' manner evinced that privacy was desired, and she rose, and De and Brad passed from the room and out into the night.

Those remaining in the road without, after the others had entered the house, had evidently departed, and the man and woman were alone.

"Miss De," began Simons, "I wish, first, to apologize for my conduct at Ann Mariah Saunders'."

There was the ring of genuine regret for his previous misconduct in the man's voice, and De, worked upon as she was, felt it.

"Do not, I beg, Mr. Simons," returned the girl, "say

any more about that day. I am sure," said she, in her serious plight, "I — we all have need of charity and consideration. Let all that pass. You were saying," she prompted, "that you had something to tell me about John. What is it?"

They had removed several paces from the door into the yard.

Brad Simons, without further waiting, replied:

"Frankly, I hardly think it is worth while for me to say, that your brother can scarcely be suspected of guilt in this affair, for which he is now suffering confinement; but," and here the speaker's voice grew grave, "there are some," placing an impressive emphasis upon the last word,— "some circumstances attending the mistake which render me more than anxious for the outcome of his trial."

The other's heart had given a glad bound, when Simons had expressed his apparently open estimate of her brother's innocence; and it sank to a corresponding degree, when the professed friend concluded in such disheartening terms. Doubtless, Brad was duly alive to this effect of his adroit speech, and continued,

"I have conceived a plan by which it is possible I may be able to assist in extricating John from his unpleasant dilemma,— who, in truth, De, should no relief come to aid him, might come to —"

"What — what would happen?" breathed the thoroughly alarmed girl in accents of suspense.

"De, will you forget my conduct in the garden, and be, at all events, my friend, once more? I will not mention the alternative to John, but —"

"I have said, Mr. Simons, that — that — well, why, yes, of course, I will be — we are friends,— of course," went on the stricken woman, scarcely knowing what she

was saying,—“of course — help John — get him free — oh! do, if it is, in any way, in your power.”

“Your brother is very dear to you,— could you not bid me hope, that some day, should I show you the way to safely redeem him from these unjust suspicions, I might —”

“Oh, De,” called William White, “where are you?” and White was seen standing in the door of Mrs. Walmsey’s dwelling, peering vainly into the shroud of darkness without.

“Oh! save him — save him, if you can; that is all,— save him,” appealed John Braddock’s sister, under her breath, obeying some uncontrolled and secret instinct to suppress the nature of this interview from any over-hearing ear.

“De,” once more called William White.

A man stepped out of the neighboring darkness, and, unperceived, approaching the figures of Brad Simons and the whispering girl, reached the elbow of Simons before either the latter or his companion were aware of his presence.

“I say, gov’nur, don’t you think the night air a mite chilly fur a young lady? Country air is rayther damp. Besides, the young gent is waitin’.” Smoky Billings, with his feet planted wide apart and firmly on the ground, stood before Brad Simons and uttered this speech without any more expression than to take one hand from a pocket and wave it negligently toward William White, who was seen advancing in the direction whence the notes of Billings’ voice, raised a trifle high for the purpose, had floated to his ears upon the night air.

“William,” hurriedly exclaimed De Braddock, “Mr. Simons was —”

“Some news of her brother John,” finished Simons,

silently grinding his teeth and endeavoring to control the spasm of rage that seized him in contemplating the unmoved form of Smoky in the indistinct near vicinity. Smoky Billings, seeing his goddess safely under the protecting care of White, and whistling softly "Annie Laurie," moved with self possessed and undisturbed tread slowly from the scene and vanished in the adjacent shadows of the night.

Before reaching the door of the widow's abode, Brad found opportunity to whisper, in De's ear, an impressive necessity for secrecy.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DE AND WILLIAM.—“DO YOU LOVE ME?” “I DO.”

“THEN WHY—?”

When Brad Simons enjoined secrecy upon her, De, involuntarily and in a low assent, responded:

“Yes.”

And Brad, for the time being, was compelled to be satisfied.

William White was not.

In the first place, it had affected the writer most unpleasantly to see the girl of his heart alone, at night, in the yard, with the cattleman.

Call it jealousy; level all the philosophy, commonly unattainable to mortals, at the frame of mind of William White; invoke that perfect and absolute trust and faith, which should be accorded the average and so called perfect loves of man and woman, as you will! still, at times, we fall to wondering at and petulantly criticising the acts of those best and most beloved.

In William White's case, however, it is but fair to say, that these experiences were not only involuntary, but, soon checked in the light of calmer reflection, became the vitalizing processes by which the flower of resolution long in the bud blossomed and bore fruit. It was thus spurred by impulse, that De's lover determined upon prompt action. He resolved to let no time elapse without, at least, telling De he loved her.

Widow Walmsey's little parlor was aglow with the

efforts which the widow had put forth for the solace and entertainment of her neighbors and guests.

The quaint, antique clock, rearing its tall, oldtime form near the widow's door, had chimed half past nine.

Simons, who was a companion of no mean parts, had really served a useful turn in rallying Job Saunders a bit out of his sulks, and in diffusing a species of encouragement in the hearts of John Braddock's family; Job had strummed the old guitar, which was a relic left by the late Walmsey, and drawn a few notes of convulsed agony from the patient instrument under the genial and thawing influence of Simons' manner; and the widow and De, the latter making effort to appear cheerful and to contribute to the pleasure of the others, had sung a bar or two, in duet, with weird and extraordinary accompaniment, by Job, upon the guitar, and Uncle Peter had dozed, nodded, fallen asleep and, with a jerk, been awakened by mother.

Refreshments had been served, and Uncle Peter, at last, had dropped into hopeless slumber, in his chair. Mother Braddock, her heart with John, was trying to prolong affairs, for the sake of De and William. An aggravated attack of sulks, on Job's part, superinduced by the widow having fixed her eyes upon Simons during a brief conversation between Brad and herself on the subject of affairs of the heart and politics, had supervened.

Out in the road, Esau and Smoky had amicably adjusted their differences; and the first faint edge of the moon was preceding its silvern face just above the tops of the eastern wood, when White, with De, emerged from the widow's door.

The sweet smelling honeysuckle was scenting all about; subdued sounds of voices, presumably those of the reconciled Smoky and Esau, came in droning hum

from the wagon in the road; an occasional and not unpleasing chord, struck from the guitar by Job to keep the jealous performer in touch with the joint converse of the trying Widow Walmsey and Brad Simons, was borne upon the air without, and the moon rose higher.

The Newfoundland dog came up to his mistress, as she and William stood in the widow's yard, and rubbed against her dress, and wagged his tail in assurance of friendship and deathless devotion, and walked away.

A sound of wild, eerie song floated to the lingering lovers from the fields:

“Bonny, my child,
 Bonny and wee,
 Eyes blue and mild,
 That only can see
 Mother above, bending and low,
 Over thy cradle,
 Rocking thee so.”

The strain was wild and sad, and De instinctively drew to the side of White, as she fancied the figure of the demented singer Rachel Bolers flitting, unreally in and out of the moonlight, over the fields and through the woods beyond.

The lover felt the touch, and caught from her a breath of purity in his own quick breathing, and his soul took fire.

“De—” he whispered, softly.

The girl was silent, under the spell of the hour; her thoughts, however, not more with her present surroundings than hovering and dwelling in a lonely cell, where was a man waiting for trial of liberty,—perhaps,—she knew not,—life, itself! She saw him, in this hour of the evening moon climbing on high, in undeserved and

unmerited prison exile. Her eyes suffused and softened with tears.

Another softly spoken, "De," from her companion brought no reply from the preoccupied girl.

What if Simons could aid John? Could she, if anything happened to her brother, ever feel justified or forgiven if she had neglected to contribute her mite, however small, to his rescue?

White could not read what was passing in the mind of the troubled sister. His lack of egotism would not consent to think she was yielding to the spell of enchantment in moonlight and honeysuckle steeping his own soul in bliss unutterable; and, yet, he could hope.

"De," pleaded the man.

Her thoughts continued to run: She knew only too well what Brad Simons would wish,— she knew the sacrifice expected of her. She was, at that moment, most in need of a kindly world wise friend to advise her. She was alone — with her best loved at her side, alone. An entire subservience to the will of Simons held her in bonds of silence, and prevented, if not forbade, her speaking to William of Simons' proffered aid or obvious motive.

It is, in this manner, lurking beneath the graver interests of life, that superstitious terror and dread of we know not what work incalculable evil; and this knowledge may help us, as far as possible, to remove from our affairs that secrecy which restrains our liberty in the interest of so questionable a design as that which actuated De's persecutor.

William drew the girl's arm within his own, and felt it tremble.

"I was thinking of John," said De, simply.

"I cannot think he will suffer," ventured White, compassionately.

“I do not know,” replied the other, absently and sadly.

“De, you must know what is in my mind and heart, tonight,” said White; while, at the critical moment of his own life, realizing the time and stress of his loved one’s sorrows.

“I wonder,” said the girl, in one of those unaccountable bursts of digression which come to us at the most incongruous times, “if Job’s father will ever return,” and the two listened, in momentary silence, to one of Job’s especially emphatic chords upon the guitar aimed, by the disconsolate and sentimental musician, with particularly pointed venom at a serious climax in the relations of Simons and the widow.

White stilled his own disappointment, and made a quiet and commonplace attempt at reply in the remark:

“The widow stands a poor chance without Job’s inheritance.”

At this, De followed out William’s interpretation of her own observation, with a sad, troubled little laugh.

“De,” again said William, “can you listen to me?”

She involuntarily endeavored to detach herself from the trend of thought that had been stealing over her in the affairs of her brother, and, turning to White, replied,

“Yes,— what is it?” with no apprehension of what was coming.

“You have been so much to me, in all my thoughts and aims; you have been the confidante of my higher and better purposes; you have been so faithful in friendship, and so true, in the past, in all that seems good and worthy, that — that — I have come to look upon you as a goal for all the ways of my life, a temple to reach in the long way ahead, and in which my altar of days is builded: I love you, my own, my heart!”

The solemn night echoed the words; the clinging

honeysuckle vine perfumed, with its rarest blossom and flower, the air of that "temple" builded not only "in the long way ahead," but builded then, builded in the remote and dim ages of the past, builded for all time and all eternity; and the mystic and beaming splendors of the ancient and hoary moon touched with loving sweetness and power the burning moments.

"William," softly replied the girl, "I am — not myself to-night. Could you wait? Sometime —"

It wrenched the lover to hear her say it! There are moments when, wrought to the highest pitch of love, hope and anticipation, it seems we cannot accept denial. At least, it seemed so to William White.

"But, De," he could not understand; how could he? "why not now?" he paused and stood before her. Someone laughed, uproariously, in the wagon,—it sounded like Smoky Billings.

"I — I — cannot — I am not able — you will wait, William, I know?" appealingly cried the girl, lifting her swimming eyes to his.

"De, there is something between us I do not understand. Has it anything to do with — with Brad Simons?" a note of hoarseness broke sharply in the speaker's voice.

"Oh! William," cried the heart broken one, "do not ask me."

"De," said the man, with forced calm, "do you love me?"

And De answered,

"I do."

"Then, why —?"

De, my child," said the quiet voice of Mother Braddock, at Mrs. Walmsey's door, "it's time we wuz a-movin'."

CHAPTER XXIX.

ESAU MAKES A DISCOVERY OF INCREASING MYSTERY AND BEWILDERMENT.

Esau entered the barn. It was morning. The farm-boy had been instructed, by Uncle Peter Braddock, to grease the harness. He entered the stable whistling the stirring air, "Run, girls, run, the fire's in the haymow!" The whistler's tones were clear and piercing, and the effect of the effort might have caused very free and willing flight of any listener, male or female, to the ear-splitting performance. As Esau entered the barn, he gave a fat, rolling kick at a stray porker wandering, in grunting laziness, through the broad midway aisle of the shelter for objects of farm life. The smell of the hay in the loft, mingled with that from the horses in their stalls, followed Esau into the compartment used for harness, and combined a most agreeable and stable odor with the the penetrating smell of long-greased leather.

When Esau had reached his destination, and the conclusion of his musical efforts, he changed his whistling tones to those of surprised speech and exclaimed,

"Now, I'll be darned! who's been in this here harness room?"

Evidence of great confusion and unaccustomed disorder, in the immediate locality, appeared to justify Esau's exclamation of wonderment. Horse collars, hames, old skeleton saddletrees, buggy and wagon traces, and all the articles and odds and ends of hitching gear

familiar to the human necessities for the horse, lay in confusion about the floor.

Esau stood and gazed helplessly at this abuse of his orderly department; and, at length, with his foot, aimlessly pushed aside a piece of harness, as it lay upon the floor before him. A small slip of paper, lying concealed beneath the object thus displaced, now became visible. Esau stooped and picked up the bit of paper. The scrap was a portion of an old envelope. On the fragment, in one corner, still remained the name and address of some firm in Chicago, the description of the nature of whose business had been torn away in the process which had left the ragged remains. Esau poured over his find, deciphered with his little school learning the printed Chicago item and fell in defeat before some written characters appearing in an almost illegible scrawl on the balance of the scrap. Esau could not read writing.

"I'll show that 'ere to Miss De," said the boy referring, like with all other questions giving rise to perplexity of his sluggish intellect, the matter of the puzzling piece of writing to his one infallible authority.

The farmboy, without more ado, and thrusting the slip of paper into a pocket of his butternuts, proceeded methodically to replace, in their accustomed places, the elements of disorder that had found unaccountable resting place upon the floor. He then got out the harness grease and went so far as to treat several pieces of harness therewith, when his interest reawakened in the scrap of paper, accompanied, as that latter article was, by the circumstances of the mysterious invasion of the Braddock barn; the position of affairs finally impelling the farmboy, at this point, to rise from a nail keg, upon which he had been sitting, and to walk straight into the house and up to De Braddock, who was scouring knives. He, here, asked bluntly and without preliminary,

“What’s that?” Esau accompanied his question with a movement which, without much ceremony, thrust the piece of envelope right under the pleasing nose of pretty De.

“Why, Esau,” said De good naturedly, “how you do startle one! What’s what, you great big fellow?”

“That,” said the boy.

“This — this piece of paper? Why, nothing that I can see,—stay — wait — why, Esau, where —? Oh, mother,” broke off De, “see,” and the girl ran to her mother.

Farmer Braddock, here, entered the kitchen.

“I say, Esau,” exclaimed Braddock, “I beat ye, this mornin’, ’ith that harness. I got out there an’ tuk it all down. Have to straighten that ’air harness room out some, I reckon. Ye’ bin out there? Had to go away, I did, to git that there plaguey heifer out’n the woods — strays away, all the time.” The farmer did not appear to notice the preoccupation of those present, and ran on in a talkative, interested vein. “Seen some fellers sneak-in’ aroun’, down there, by the river — that darn cuss, weth a big, black beard, ’at they talk so much about bein’ th’ leader uv them thieves, wuz with ’em, too. Thought I seen some women, er somep’n, a-follerin’ ’em. I got the heifer, an’ they all skinned out, w’en they see *me*, I tell ye. ’Y Gosh!—”

The shadows and the phantoms were ever wanly jigging, ever drawing nearer; but the fat boy, for the moment, unconsciously intercepted their further eerie gloom.

“Yep,—I put the hull biz’ness back on the pegs,” answered Esau to Braddock’s question as to the farm-boy’s previous presence in the barn. The fat boy ignored the latter part of Mr. Braddock’s remarks; accepting, likewise, in stolid and additional silence, his explana-

tion of the disorder lately discovered in Uncle Peter's stable; but unsatisfied about the paper.

"Jis' thought, I did, 'at I'd do a leet'le, myself; but it's all right. Do it your own way. Mother — why, what's the matter?" ejaculated Peter; "ye look — you an' De — like ye'd seen a ghost!"

Indeed, Mrs. Braddock and her daughter were expressive images of surprise and dismay.

"You know anything 'bout this here, Peter," asked Mrs. Braddock, indicating the slip of paper in her daughter's trembling fingers.

"Why, no; I don't know 'at I do," said Mr. Braddock, coming forward. "'Low ye mout tell me whut 't is, an' I could tell ye, p'raps, more 'bout it. What is it?"

"Esau, there, kin tell more p'intedly, an' I kin," rejoined Martha Braddock. "Esau, boy, speak up. Where 'd ye git it?"

"Why, in 'tarnation! don't ye speak, when ye're spoken to, ye cub, ye?" irritably exclaimed Uncle Peter; "don't ye hear 'em? Whut be the matter weth ye, ye loonytick?"

This forceful and, maybe, somewhat unjust assault upon the farmboy was called forth by two things,— first, a naturally slow witted condition of the farmboy's mentality; and, secondly, by the farmboy's present confusion, in his own mind, of a species of intellectual tonic a neighboring farmhand had but lately read him concerning the fate of "Gunpowder Dick, or the Slaughtered Innocents," with the mystery in the recent "find" in the barn,— result: Esau's laborious speculation upon the likelihood of the present mysterious truth proving stranger than past fiery fiction. Upon the Indianian's remarks being threatened with the reinforcement of the Indianian's coarse, rawhide boot as a spur, in the rear,

to the farmboy's tardy working faculties, Esau dismissed visionary and comparative mystery, and descended to the practical world. He related for the information of those there the circumstances of his coming into possession of the piece of torn envelope.

"'Twa'n't there when I wuz there, fur I seen nothin' on that blessed floor from eend to eend, I didn't," subjoined Mr. Braddock, flatly. "But, see here, ye've worked me up, e'en afore I've as much ez had a squint at thet 'air paper," and Braddock stretched forth his hand, and Mother Braddock placed the fragment of paper in the old farmer's fingers.

"'Whut's this?" said Uncle Peter, in wondering surprise, and reading aloud, "*You will better let Brad Simons be to you an aid, than a snare. He knows the ways of John and the man that will hang, and can know more. But be sure of him.*" Hoity toity!" said the old man; "some — ? — no, you can't write," this broken observation was addressed to the farmboy, now finally launched into a worthy and silent comparison of the mystery contained in the unsigned paper with that of "The Slaughtered Innocents."

Brad Simons came riding up at this moment, dismounted, reached the rose covered porch of the house and knocked briskly at the front door.

De went to the door in answer to the summons, wondering possibly at the nature of so early a call, and unaware, until confronted by Brad, of the identity of the caller.

"'Father," called De as she saw Simons, and without waiting for the latter to speak, "bring that paper here," a sudden sense of her own dominant influence asserting itself, and causing her to take the lead now and, in all subsequent relations affecting her brother's case in the family, from that time forth.

“Mr. Simons, do you know anything of this?” demanded the girl, fixing her clear, honest truth compelling gaze upon the cattleman’s full, round face and shifting eyes.

The manifest surprise and amazed repudiation, in Brad Simons’ look, and his unuttered contempt, too plain, however, to be mistaken, as to the slip of paper and its contents, might have satisfied anyone of his lack of guilt. Added to this, the scornful and genuine denunciation, which Simons instantly unburdened himself of against the author of this anonymous communication, was sufficient to convince the most skeptical of Simons’ entire and perfect innocence of all and everything connected with the authorship of the warning and advice contained in the fragmentary note discovered by Esau.

“Then, who did it?” was De’s emphatic inquiry.

CHAPTER XXX.

A COMPACT.

As trifling as the anonymous scrawl had struck Uncle Peter, and as contemptuously as Brad Simons had made out to, and actually did, esteem the unknown writer of it,—owing mainly, however, to the mistrust of himself expressed in the closing sentence of the secret missive that De had received by the unconscious hand of Esau,—in spite of these circumstances, there was, in the brief and unsigned note, food for reflection, in their different ways, for both John Braddock's sister and Bradford Simons.

To De it was manifest, in the first place, that another, whosoever that other might be, entertained the same opinion of the powers for good or ill that she herself had been slowly forming respecting Brad Simons. This view none too pleasantly strengthened her, in spite of herself, in that opinion of this man who, to her mind, had become so singularly identified with John's fate.

To Simons' astute mode of reasoning, the note, in the parts not casting mistrust upon himself, gave him a species of additional advantage over the young girl whom he was trying, by every means in his power, to get under his control.

The existence of evidence, contained in the words of Uncle Peter uttered previously to his learning of the anonymous paper and just before the recent arrival of

Brad upon the scene, that the outlaws had been seen hovering about the Braddock farm, may be taken as important, in various ways. It cannot, however, in any way be construed as implicating Simons in any unexplained collusion with one or more of the sleepless units of the lawless body, in this last effort at the influencing of the mind of De Braddock. Brad was clear of all this. Nevertheless, the unforeseen event of the unknown writer's message was destined, in its own way, to effect the climax which the tireless and unsparing cattle trader had so long and patiently been conspiring to — De's surrender.

The phantom fates were, truly, materializing into a far too uncomfortable reality; and with Black Hank and Rachel Bolers flitting furtively in their midst.

Notwithstanding, it does not seem to have suggested itself to the thought of Peter Braddock, that the vicinity of "some fellers" led by a "darn cuss, weth a big, black beard," and some women "a-follerin'" might have been significant; Uncle Peter, slow going and easy, permitted the incident of the fragment of writing to become eradicated from his thoughts, with an underestimated value of its importance, in whatever fashion, affecting him or his.

Mother Braddock, if uneasy thoughts or reflections she continued to carry in regard to Esau's discovery, said nothing.

And Esau wove a romance out of the mysterious slip of paper that would have out-gunpowdered "Gunpowder Dick" and all of that explosive young man's degenerate kind,— a work of lurid fancy ranking in the scale of mysteries and events at an equal height with all the thrilling and bloodcurdling romances which the ample and sufficient capacity of respectable literature ever produced.

"Here, ye loiterin' feller, git right out, ag'in, to that there harness," exclaimed Uncle Peter to the brooding Esau.

The farmboy came out of his gruesome trance with a start.

"Ye'll be the death o' me, ye will," muttered Peter, whose temper was perpetually aggravated by a "loiter-in'" disposition inherent in his young farm assistant in the face of a sleepless, unwearying energy and vigor possessed by the old man.

As the ambling figure of the fat farmboy passed out of the kitchen door into the rear dooryard, Brad Simons, who by this time, had wormed his own way into the kitchen, appeared, with an effort, to rouse himself from his own thoughts, and proceeded to follow the melodramatically minded youth into the yard.

"I say," said Simons when, just as the farmboy was preparing to enter the big barn, Brad overtook the lad,—
"I say, do you know anything more about this scrap-of-paper business, than you have told?" and Simons fixed a look of penetrating scrutiny upon the full, open countenance, suffused with food, healthy, country red, halted, by its owner, within a few feet of his own. "It may have a very serious bearing—effect upon the interests of your mistress, Miss De."

Reference to De moved the fat boy, as the questioner meant it should; but beyond Esau's powers, under the trying circumstances, to express. He felt like blubbering. However, he succeeded in checking this impulse to unmanly emotion, with recollections of the "nerve" and coolness displayed in grave emergencies by "Gunpowder Dick." And at this turn Esau stooped ponderously, carefully detached a wheat straw from its detaining place between a board and a long thin splinter of the same, and, rising once more to a position of erect contempla-

tion, put the straw into his mouth, chewed twice upon it and thoughtfully viewed the person of Brad Simons from head to heel.

"Did you hear what I said?" rather sharply and further questioned Brad.

"I heerd ye," answered the ruminating farmhand, "an' ye needn't try Uncle Peter's scoldin' game with me — won't go," the fat boy removed the straw for but the briefest second from his lips; gazed upon it, and returned it to the recesses of his jaws, from whence, thereafter, it continued to protrude as a silent testimonial to the transient destiny of all straws.

"Well, at least, answer me, will you?" persisted Brad Simons, in a more conciliatory manner.

"I hain't no more information on this here murd'rus and meestee'us plot," observed Esau, and in that sentence dismissed from the vital issues of the hour all but harness grease, and smartly betook his operations to the instant application of that useful article to the harness; for he had perceived, afar, the lowering approach of Uncle Peter descending upon him with "lightning, storm and wrath" writ upon his brow.

Simons was painfully forced to content his mind with a conviction of the boy's entire freedom from any further or unwarrantable complicity in the anonymous writing; and the unscrupulous and determined cattleman, bent on probing this new development and establishing, if possible, an additional bond between De and himself, was turning reluctantly to retrace his steps to the house, when an object attracted his attention and he turned back to the barn.

"Wasn't that that fellow that cursed one armed writer has employed over there at Walmsey's?" queried Simons to himself.

"Now, what the devil! — If," continued Mr. Simons

in imperfect and broken speech, "this sort of thing keeps up much longer,—" what, "if this sort of thing kept up," would have been the consequences (which, judging by Brad Simons' past record, might have been bad enough to suit any taste), the soliloquizer left unspecified.

He went around the barn, to which general locality he had espied the sudden withdrawal from view of the figure of a man resembling, in the fleeting glimpse Brad had been afforded, the person and original bearing of the inimitable and self possessed Mr. Smoky Billings.

Sure enough, upon reaching the far side of the stable, Simons, the perturbed, discovered Billings, the composed, in presentable raiment of dark cloth, wholly unconcerned and sitting on a log.

In an easy and natural manner, the ex-sailor rose, as Simons "hove in sight," and, as if expecting a visit of respect by appointment from the puzzled as well as disturbed and angry cattle dealer, advanced with a bearing of perfect cordiality and wished Mr. Simons a "very good morning;" remarking, as an item of seemingly indispensable cheer, that,

"He hoped Mr. Simons' hammock had swung clear on the night previous," which remark, properly understood, meant, on Smoky Billings' seafaring part, that White's new assistant would be glad to know that Mr. Simons' previous night's rest had been comfortable.

Brad Simons eyed the unmoved character evilly for a moment.

"You don't say so!" sneeringly retorted the raiser of cattle. Simons' memory was actively employed in recalling the singularly interesting part which Smoky Billings had taken in the cattleman's discomfiture on the evening of the social gathering at Widow Walmsey's.

Smoky Billings' rejoinder to this ungracious reception of his agreeable advances was to spread his lips upon his visible teeth; smile affably, and remain silent.

"I'll give you a good night's rest, one of these times, my fine fellow," burst forth the enraged cattle trader, rightly construing Smoky's friendly speech to relate to a night's repose,—“you and your d——d master!” Simons had an object in view with White's man; and, certain of the difficulties in the way of its attainment, was, nevertheless, unable to contain the mass of discontent which preyed upon his working vitals.

“You'd better give that housekeeper o' yourn a rest,” suavely replied the smiling gentleman in front of the angry man.

Simons took a step forward, and raised his clenched fist containing a riding whip; but a peculiar glitter in the eye of the onetime artist of the road detained the upraised menace.

“No, on second thought,” coolly quoted the unmoved Smoky, containing his own large and disproportioned hands within the knowing recesses of his own pockets, “‘I don't think I would,’ said the villain, scowlin' darkly upon the roarin' stream at his feet, and soliloquizing to hisself, ‘it might be the death o' me.’” and Brad's antagonist glanced composedly into the face of his opponent and gave, with secret though unapparent relish, the lines of his stirring and highly colored authority.

Simons lowered his fist and whip; his face worked for a moment, and then seemed to slowly regain its calm; he dropped his hand, with the whip in it. He took one or two swallows and cleared his throat.

Smoky very considerably shifted his gaze from the

face of the disconcerted and laboring man, and, fixing a look of intelligent scrutiny and polite criticism upon the weathervane representing a fish placed symmetrically upon the gable end of the barn, he opined, "that, that was it and that was the way of it." "And," added the literary wanderer, "never go a-fishin' till ye read that book by that feller, 'at I once heerd wrote it," this reference to a writer on the angler's pursuits doubtless embracing vague impressions of the observer of the fish on the Braddock stable relating to a celebrated character in literature of the name of Walton.

"I came, sir, to ask you a question," finally said Brad Simons, in a strained, metallic voice.

"Now, I rather expected when you seen me sail behin' this here barn," said Simons' companion colloquially, "that I'd have the disting'ished pleasure of a call in port from you, but the value you place on this character here," added Billings, "in any matter 'at I can answer to is 'greater honor 'an he knew,' " much humility and apparent self abasement attended this further quoted utterance of Smoky.

It had been Brad Simons' policy to first win the confidence of this man, much as he despised the seafaring character, and suddenly confront the latter with the anonymous note, hoping to find the clue to the secret missive in the uncovering of some deep though, to Brad, incomprehensible plot in which Billings might have a hand. Brad Simons had lost his self possession, a bad thing at all times to do, and the only thing left him was to go bluntly to the point, or leave the matter in which he was interested unnoticed.

He chose the first method; he went bluntly to the point.

"There was found," said Simons, without further preliminary, "a suspicious communication in the barn,

this morning. Do you know anything about it?" with this observation, Brad unceremoniously "poked" the note, obtained from De for "tracing" purposes, beneath the nose of Smoky Billings much after the unexpected and unprepared manner previously observed by Esau with De.

Smoky Billings' wide-open-eyed wonder convinced Simons of total innocence, in this quarter, at least; and Brad paid little serious additional heed to Smoky's polite disclaimers. De's pursuer was a good judge of men, but, for other reasons, had he struck Smoky Billings dead at his feet he had escaped the fatal hand of the doomsman.

Experiencing no great sense of satisfaction in his interview, Brad turned to depart with the few heartfelt and parting words:

"I owe you no love, my friend, and I'll pay you out one of these days; but, I guess, this scrap of paper doesn't lie at your door."

"Mr. Smoky Billings, which is w'at you gents in this 'ere rejun has named this 'ere wanderin' minstrel," quoth Smoky, "is sensible of the con-fee-dence and esteem conveyed in them last sentiments, and when you find yerself a-hangin' around the nayborhood of Billings Castle, County Billings," hospitably added he, "yer mustn't furgit, 'at the latch string stretches as much as a mile an' more, right your way," with which particularly urgent and pressing invitation to partake of the ancestral entertainment of the noble Billings' aristocratic county seat, Smoky lit a short, rich, black pipe and smoked luxuriously.

Simons withdrew.

Smoky Billings was not the mysterious agent of the disturbing fragment of envelope; and Brad Simons, in respect of his judgment of Smoky's innocence in this

particular, much as he now disliked one who had so openly braved him, was right. Simons' own person, seen recently riding by Billings' place of employment at Mrs. Walmsey's, was the occasion, this morning, of Smoky's attendance at Uncle Peter Braddock's farm. In other words, Billings, in popular terms, was "keeping an eye on" Brad.

So the knowledge of the recent anonymous writing first heard of, by Billings, through Brad, put Smoky to thinking; and it is doubtful whether any scrap of paper, from the days of the first printing press to the present time, ever set so many people by the ears, or occasioned more genuine or lasting concern.

Simons, returning to the Braddock farmhouse, found De, as we have seen her once before, standing at the gate and looking wistfully down the road.

She was oppressed with a sense of care and responsibility.

Simons reached the side of the girl in the familiar gingham dress, her apron falling in snowy white draping from the graceful waist; and tresses of the chestnut hair streaming at random through the caressing touches of the vagrant and amorous breeze.

A dead sycamore, close at hand, sheltered, or rather with its bare stricken limbs afforded support for, the solitary crow poising in seeming anticipation of significant flight, at sight of Simons, to the protecting wood at a secure distance beyond.

"You will let me find who did this?" said Brad Simons, as he came to De's side. He held the piece of envelope in his hand.

"Oh," replied the object of his address hopelessly, "what does it matter? Let it be."

"No," positively rejoined Simons, who was making of the affair a means of selfishly prolonging, to some

definite advantage to himself, the present interview; "I shall hunt out the writer of this; and now, De," pursued the cattle raiser, "what have you to say to me? I want to be your friend and John's. I want to be *your* friend. I want you."

Not without a shade of anxiety, Brad waited for the girl to speak. On the evening of the gathering at Widow Walmsey's, William White, in Brad Simons' knowledge and following the conference between Brad's self and De Braddock, had enjoyed a private conversation of his own with Peter Braddock's daughter. Simons confessed to some uneasiness to know what that meeting between White and De, in Widow Walmsey's yard, had resulted in.

"I only know one thing," responded the cattleman's victim, shuddering: "my brother John must be cleared of this mystery and unjust suspicion resting upon him—must be freed from the dangers which threaten him."

"That," replied Brad with an air of sympathy, "is precisely what *I* say. But," brazenly, now that the ice was broken, went on the heartless schemer, "I love you. Do not shrink. You will soon see,—well, you nor no woman can be indifferent to such love as I bear," said the man hotly. "Give me but to hope—"

"Mr. Simons," again said the woman in scarcely audible tones, "John must be rescued from whatever this may bring to him. If," continued the speaker, with a face white and set and straining in a consciousness of the crow flying in the distance and just nearing the edge of the wood,—“if you can make sure that John will not unjustly suffer for the murder of Zeke Smithin—”

"You will——?" exclaimed Simons advancing, impulsively.

"I will——," said De.

And the unhappy compact wanted nothing more to complete its cruel meaning; or its heroic self sacrifice, on the part of the devoted and faithful girl.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WILLIAM WHITE FACES HIS ENEMIES.

After the apparent open and confessed association of Brad Simons and Jason Jump, the political manager of Grigscomb, had taken place in the encounter between Likkum and Simons, based upon White's elementary connection with the congressional race in that district, the ex-soldier and present political possibility saw no cause to doubt an understanding between Brad Simons and Jason Jump. The latter, in White's knowledge, had come to that community mysteriously enough. Simons, at first, had provided Jump with an introduction into the circle of neighborhood affairs, but their intercourse, — that of the newcomer and the local stock dealer, — was, after that, of very rare and unapparent occurrence. Jason Jump was known to be doing a small business in cattle of his own, which afforded him ostensibly a legitimate means of livelihood, in the view of those whose interest or attention might induce them to question appearances in this respect, in the case of Simons' friend. White was possessed of a singular feeling, however, that there was a bond of closer and more intimate concern between the two men — were the truth known, a concealed connection which might even disclose an additional depth of collusion affecting his own unceasing desire to unearth the meaning of Rachel Bolers' incoherent and wandering utterances concerning Brad Simons, De Braddock and himself, in the cave, on the

night of his own abduction. As disordered as Rachel Bolers' expressions had been, William White could not for the life of him, help regarding them as containing a vital and important meaning. White had heard Black Hank speak on but one occasion,—when De's lover had been taken, blindfolded, to the caves. Such was the marvelous skill, with which Jason Jump, in the character of the outlaw chieftain, effected a complete change of tone, speech and manner, that the confused and discomfited writer, in his limited opportunity, was endowed with no conscious powers of identifying one with another. Notwithstanding, there were fleeting times, after a while, that followed his being taken to the caverns, when something struck him as strangely familiar in Jason Jump's voice, as if he had heard it before, and under circumstances impossible to recall. This last condition of things puzzled and annoyed him greatly, and just why he could not tell. He found himself, more than once, stopping in his walk, as an echo of the notes of Jump's tones would seem to float past his ears. It was no use; he would have to let it go—cease trying to remember where that voice had ever come to him in the past. The trick of memory failed him!

Another interest destined to absorb the life of William White was beginning to surely creep upon him, to surprise him and to enslave him; but in a different way, perhaps, from the exclusive subjection to love and love's affairs. The question of his taking seriously the wishes of his friends to allow his name to be placed before the convention to nominate a candidate for congress had been sprung and would not down or rest. One thing alone would have been sufficient to cause him, in any way, to lend himself to the desires of his more intimate personal following, and that was the recently formed conviction, on his own part, of a questionable and un-

worthy coalition between Grigscomb's political manager and Simons. This instinctively caused White, as Grigscomb's proposed congressional opponent, to hesitate about refusing to take any course that might tend to stem the current of a threatened flood of evil influences under the joint promotion of Jason Jump and Brad Simons. Rumor, too, now and then, and quite recently, had connected Brad's name with some transactions very much resembling those of the organized outlawry of the neighborhood; and White, turning this last item over in his mind, had reached the conclusion that it was high time for the community, in some manner, to combine for the defeat of this mysterious and baffling condition of crime and terror existing in its midst. Realizing to the full the local interests apparently alone involved, it yet appealed strongly to his native sense that there was here a plain threat to connect seemingly the worst elements of society with the national as well as local system of government. Out of his own inherent sense of natural right, and with his suspicions now fully aroused, William White was as prompt and determined to take a stand on a platform with his friends, as he had been to previously reject the idea of making a congressional race merely for a questionable personal advancement.

The dark motives that might be supposed to inspire the way Brad Simons was going, if not, likewise, the course being pursued by Jason Jump, could not fail, in the judgment of the coming writer-politician, essentially to color the actions of Grigscomb, the confessed representative of both Simons and Jump and all they might seem to stand for.

Late one afternoon, following the attempt upon De and her rescue by Smoky Billings, Smoky and William White stood side by side, in front of Jacobs' Store, in

T——; as, in figure of language, they were destined, thereafter, to stand side by side to the end of life. They were watching two suspicious looking characters who sat in a farm wagon, standing on the corner of the public square, directly opposite to where William and his constant attendant remained observing, without the appearance of doing so, the movements of the others.

"They're part of Simons' cattle driving outfit," remarked White. The speaker allowed his gaze, as if aimlessly, to wander down the street, but in a direction contrary to that in which were the objects of his watchfulness, thus successfully diverting the attention of the latter from the meaning of his speech.

"They drive his cattle; but I've seen 'em stop an' speak to that 'air Jump feller, too," rejoined Smoky in a low tone.

"Don't let them see that we are talking about them," said his companion.

"They're up to something," was the other's guarded response. "They're a-waitin' fur someun'," and Smoky Billings slowly and apparently without purpose turned, his glance casually sweeping the circle of his vision and, at the same time, catching sight of the distant form of Jason Jump who, nearing the office of Benjamin Grigscomb, was seen to join the lawyer as the last named came upon the scene from his place of occupation.

An idea seemed suddenly to seize Smoky.

"I'm a-goin' over an' talk to them fellers in th' wagon," said he. "Wisht yo'd stay an' watch them other skunks," politely referring, in William White's understanding, to the able and efficient personalities of Jason Jump and Benjamin Grigscomb, who were gradually drawing near to the spot where Smoky and his chief tarried.

"Be careful," was all White said.

A moment elapsed. The writer scratched a match and lighted a pipe with the skilful use of his one hand. Billings walked easily into the middle of the street, across which was the wagon where sat the two countrymen; stooped, and appeared to pick from the ground some object that had seemingly attracted his attention and drawn him thither. As he rose from his bending posture he flourished conspicuously in his hand a silver dollar, with the remark, uttered in a loud, bantering voice in the direction of those sitting in the vehicle near him,

"You fellers around here must have money ter throw away,"—the operator's method of covering his movements was certainly both original and successful. He had dropped the coin at the moment of picking it up; had, by the action, introduced the occasion of speech with the objects of his address in the wagon, and, at this point, naturally passed on to the country conveyance and displayed the fruits of his supposed find to the questioning looks of those seated in the wagon. As he rose to an upright position with the dollar in his grasp, Smoky, for an instant, was scanned by one of the two men forming the purpose of his present maneuver, who turned swiftly to his companion and hurriedly whispered something. The other shook his head doubtfully.

"I tell you it is," said the first speaker, accompanying his assertion with a rude oath.

When Smoky Billings reached the wagon, it was plain, however he had succeeded in avoiding suspicion before, that he was now eyed darkly and distrustfully by, at least, one of the occupants of the vehicle before him. The suspicious countryman gave the daring of Billings no time for further play.

"What," he said sulkily, "ye want weth us?"

The pretended finder of the coin realized instantly that there was no margin here for slow work. He darted a quick look at the lowering face of the man in the wagon.

White, of course, had witnessed the artifice employed by Billings to effect an approach to Simons' drovers, and been unable to refrain from a concealed smile of admiration at the unexpected and cunning resource of his follower; but his attention, at once, became taken up by the approach of Jump and Grigscumb; and, for the time being, Smoky was left to fight his own battles.

Smoky Billings' glance, shot at the other in the wagon, locked with one as unsparingly sent into his own eyes.

"What do I want weth ye, ye shrimp!" retorted the seafarer; "well, ef I wanted ye to be civil, I'd git left, reckon."

"What ye got in yer hand?" asked his adversary, pointing to the one in which was held the object just taken from the road, and favoring the immovable Billings with the dawn of an evil grin.

"That, ye lobster," pursued the sailor, "is what I wuz a-thinking I might show yer mightiness. Whut's ailin' ye, might a mere nobuddy ask, anyhow?"

This appearing to form an issue, Smoky Billings' watchful antagonist drew from his pocket a plug of navy chewing tobacco; cut from it a liberal supply and placed it carefully in his mouth, while he inspected Smoky Billings' composed countenance with sinister intentness; restored the plug to his pocket, and chewed, for a moment, thoughtfully and silently.

"We know you," finally said the chewer, with slow and deadly deliberation, "and you had better get out of this part of the country."

Smoky looked at the shadows in the west, fore-runners of the closing day.

"Much obleeged fur your good will a-lettin' me know," rejoined Billings affably; "but I likes this here neck o' th' wood fu'st rate. Think I'll stay."

William White still stood where Smoky had left him.

"Mr. Grigscomb," White said, as John Braddock's lawyer came by in company of his political manager and nodded to William, "there is something concerning Braddock's case I want to consult you about."

The lawyer paused.

Jump said to Grigscomb,

"I'll see you later," turned to the writer, with a show of cordiality; bowed and smiled, and passed on.

"What is it, Mr. White?" inquired John's lawyer.

The deep interest which William White had felt in the fate of John Braddock, it will be recalled, had already caused the former to note the weakness of the latter's case, on the occasion of the visit which White, together with De and her mother and father, had made to John in confinement; and the concerned writer had learned with distress of the failure, as yet, of the defense to supply a witness to John's *alibi*. It had made him doubly uneasy, since the visit to the jail, to observe that Brad Simons and De were to be seen frequently together in apparently confidential communication. This last fact, more than any other, filled De's lover with uneasiness and apprehension.

"You know," began White, "that I feel a degree of interest in this case, owing scarcely more to the concern I cherish for John Braddock and his sister, than to the fact that these disorders in the community have reached to such an extent, if something is not done to stop them, we will soon have no community to live in."

Like all selfish men, Grigscomb had but one interest in any way affecting the community or the world he lived in, and that interest was his own. "You know, Mr. White," he said indifferently, "that I'm a busy man. If you have anything to say to me relating to the case you speak of, which can affect the interest of my client, I shall be glad to hear it. I do not know that it is necessary to waste much time on the community. It is apt to take care of itself, and leave you to take care of yours." This was Grigscomb without the mask, inspired by the secret contempt felt for White, at best. To another he would not have dreamed of so speaking. William White, as much as he had thought himself conversant with the absolute insincerity of the professional social and political expression and sentiment of his times, was amazed at the man. It afforded the coming political aspirant, as well as the aroused and awakened writer, the opportunity of unavoidable duty. He took it.

"Mr. Grigscomb," said he, "I am puzzled how to deal with such an astounding utterance, on your part. You surely cannot mean what you have just said, occupying the place of vital and representative importance you do, in this locality?"

"I am a busy man."

Forgetting, for the moment, the question of a witness to an *alibi* for John Braddock, William White broke out in plain honesty,

"Mr. Grigscomb, if I am given the nomination, in this district, for congress, I shall take great pleasure in accepting it, if only to make it possible to send someone besides yourself to Washington, in order (and I say it in personal good will to you), that our representatives may aid in rescuing the people from such indifference as you see fit to display to their welfare."

Grigscomb, taken by surprise, stood looking dumbly

at the man who had just spoken. It would be difficult to fully account for the instantaneous and numbing effect of the brief speech the literary man had made. Somehow, it had told as in a public address.

The two were interrupted here by Smoky Billings, who approached without ceremony and, as Grigscomb shifted his gaze, by a brief nod gave White to understand there was something going on that required attention.

"Mr. White," observed White's flurried political adversary, studiously recovering his poise and attempting to speak with intense sarcasm, "your frankness is equaled by your preeminently successful previous political and professional reputation and the respect and confidence in which you have been held in the community you so devotedly defend."

To this additional fling at his well known humanitarianism and charity,

"If truth is held in contempt, and unselfish solicitude for others ridiculed," returned Grigscomb's composed antagonist, "it is not for those, who are naturally strong enough to take up suffering humanity's load, to flinch; nor for those, whose natures seem made to scoff and jeer at beauty and perfection, to succeed in restraining the disinterested and self denying in their efforts for something as worthy as deliberate, cold blooded selfishness and unfair advantage," Mr. White's present appearance and, doubtless, best, as an expounder of political economy, was going well.

"I see," ironically sneered the lawyer, "that we'll have much pleasure in our game of political hide and seek."

"You will," replied White quietly, "not I." He beckoned to Billings and the two walked away, with a smile and a word, from Smoky's companion, to disarm

any unnecessary personal animosity, on the part of Benjamin Grigscomb.

"What is it, Smoky?" questioned the writer, when they had gotten out of earshot of Grigscomb.

"They're a-goin' out to the hills yonder," replied Smoky.

"They—who?" said White.

"That feller, Jump, an' them thare critturs in that wagon," answered the other.

"How do you know?" asked Billings' companion.

"I seen him—Jason Jump," elaborated Smoky in response to an inquiring look from White, "a-ridin' out o' town ahead, an', a'ter a bit, them wagon fellers follered, a-drivin'."

"You think they followed Jason Jump?"

"Pooty sure."

"They may be going out for cattle," said White.

"Then it's somebuddy else's," replied Smoky. "Mr. White, ef they's nothin' fur me to do on deck, weth ye, fur awhile, I'll jest go below, fur a bit."

For a moment, White looked searchingly into Smoky Billings' ordinarily impenetrable countenance. What he saw there confirmed him in his first impression. Familiar as he had grown with the figurative speech of the characteristic mariner, he readily divined Smoky's object was to follow and spy upon those whose movements had just been under discussion.

"Smoky, they'd kill you, if they caught you spying on them, like they would a rat in a trap, should they, as we suspect, be moving spirits in the mischief going on in this neighborhood," said Smoky's friend.

"If they ketch me," said Smoky.

By this time it was growing dark.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE OLD MILL.

Billings was wrong in one of his deductions. During the course of his marked and striking career in evil, Jason Jump, in any detail, was not accustomed to act, in his own undisguised personality, with the subordinates of the band of outlaws. It is known that even Benjamin Grigscomb, in the lifetime of the noted outlaw, never had other knowledge than that of the quiet and apparently law abiding citizen Jason Jump. Hence, it follows that the going out of town, at one and the same time, of Jump and the two men in the wagon, as observed by Smoky Billings, could not have been the result of open conspiracy, at the moment, as between outlaws. Their movements, in view of subsequent developments, doubtless, had been previously arranged in the regular, secret conclaves of the marauders, under the disguises and mutual concealments employed to deceive one another.

Finding Smoky Billings resolved, White announced his determination of accompanying him. Night had now set in, and, with misgivings which he strove in vain to quiet, William White passed out of the town with his follower, little reconciled in his own doubts and fears by the remote hope, on so seemingly wild and reckless an adventure, of securing something which might relate to his own connection with the outlaws and De Braddock. They were unarmed, a circumstance that, while it increased their danger, was, at the instant, im-

possible to remedy. Billings, as usual, was wholly composed and quite at his ease. White's uneasiness was not an evidence of cowardice, for there were few braver men than he in that community; but rather proceeded from the intangible something which mixes discretion with the better part of courage. Both he and Smoky had a general familiarity with the resorts of the freebooters; and, once committed to the projects of his hardy and adventurous companion, White foresaw no limit to the disposition of the former to penetrate as far as possible into the region of the outlaws' refuge. They were both mounted and rode slowly and with great care; this, White insisting upon after a considerable extent of comparatively safe country had been traversed at a fair rate of speed.

In the darkness, they came suddenly upon the wagon which had but a short time before proved a part of the lure that had drawn them from town. It was easily found to be empty; the two men who had occupied it being nowhere to be seen. No moon aided them, and the light from the stars was not great. Objects were but faintly visible, with that vague shadowy indistinctness so illusive and deceptive.

"Billings," whispered White, "if they have not already discovered us and are waiting in ambush, we had, if we want to escape their observation, better get down, tie our horses there among the trees and look around on foot."

"All right, cap'n," returned Billings in similar whispered tones.

Moving with caution, they entered the wood nearby; and, after satisfying themselves that all was safe, approached the edge of the forest, leaving their horses securely fastened to a clump of hickory saplings.

"Sh!" warned Smoky, whose quick hearing had

caught the sound of movement in the road. Someun' out there."

Safely concealed from view, by their position among the trees, the two watchers peered forth in an effort to determine the source of noises which had arrested Smoky's attention. Dim figures were seen moving toward them, not far distant in the road. They appeared but as so many blurs against the surrounding objects of the night. They moved steadily forward, dark shadows flitting in the gloom past dim fence lines, rocks but dark blotches on the somber skies, and, as they proceeded, blotting the lighter hue of soil in the roadway with irregular, dancing forms.

As they came opposite to where the two stood silent and motionless among the trees, one of the figures spoke.

"I tell ye I heerd the sound uv hosses," declared a man's strong, gruff voice positively.

It was too dark and the speaker himself too far away for White to be sure, but the latter fancied he could recognize the deep rough tones of the freebooter whom the writer had heard called Black Hank in the cave, and thought the outlines of the man in the road presented a resemblance to the bearded chief of the outlaws. He whispered his conclusions to Smoky Billings.

"Like ez not, cap'n," Smoky returned in carefully guarded speech,—*"like ez not; but be keerful, they're a-comin' this way."*

"Aw, kum on," expostulated a less exercised companion of the outlaw leader; *them's only some hosses ye heerd over in Samples's fiel's. Whut ye be about ter do?"*

The robber chieftain hesitated.

"I don't know," said he.

"I know ye don't," retorted the other; *"so come along—do somep'n,—fish er cut bait."*

The first outlaw wavered for a moment between his prompting to enter the wood,—where the horses might, then unknown to him, have been easily discovered,—and his disinclination to oppose his associate. White and Billings waited in suspense. Finally, the repeated urgings of his companion seemed to prevail, and Smoky and William had the satisfaction of seeing the two men, followed by a third, go on past their hiding place. The hidden men watched their unsuspecting quarry go like dark and disembodied specters along the unfenced fringes of the wood, which afforded the former concealment; past the shadowy fence lines, on the other side of the way, and, so, fading into the surrounding gloom, on to the unholy objects of their ghostly prowlings. It was White who first obeyed an impulse to follow the miscreants and learn, if possible, something of their immediate purposes. The two, as if acting by an unexpressed and common understanding, began slowly to work their way along the inner edge of the forest in the direction taken by the advancing outlaws. Their progress, at first tardy, grew, as they became more familiar with their ground, appreciably more rapid, so that presently they were, once more, nearly opposite the men in the road; who appeared to proceed slowly, but as if with a grim and sure undertaking in view. Just beyond were faintly traceable the dim outlines of an old mill which sat, a solitary and lonely object, perched, among the crags and rocks and trees, upon the perilous edge of a deep and narrow gorge through which ran, when its banks were full, the stream that, once, boiling and tumbling at the base of a high barren ledge of stone whence it had fallen, turned the now rotting millwheel by means of power directed through a race above the falls. The stream's channel was now dry. The mill, at one time, had been an effective addition to the uses of

the neighboring country, but finally stood a ruin, unused and dismantled, presenting only a touch of picturesqueness to the landscape. It was evident the outlaws had this decayed and lonely resort as the object of their destination. As they came to the dry channel of the stream which, descending to the lower road, had formed part of the widening course of the supply of power for the abandoned mill, the freebooters, from the side of the highway opposite their silent and relentless trailers, turned quickly to the left in among the rocks forming the ground surface and banks through which the dry creek ran. They here appeared to pause; for, though they were not visible, White and Billings could no longer hear their footsteps, and the subdued hum of stationary voices came to the ears of the two across the way. Before his companion was aware of Billings' intention, the latter had slipped out of hiding into the road and was half way to the rear of a great boulder behind which might be heard the muffled tones of the outcasts of the night. The daring scout was seen by William White to sink suddenly to the earth and, as an Indian would, wind silently to the rear of the rock concealing the others from view. He almost instantly turned and made his way rapidly and noiselessly back to the side of his own chief. Here, for the briefest moment, he stood silent. He then spoke in a low whisper.

"Mr. White," he said, "them fellers may be the ones I seen in th' wagon, in town, but that there ain't Jump what's a-leadin' of 'em. They's met by appointment, though, out here. They're a-going to separate, an' the feller w'at seems to be d'reetin' of 'em 's goin' fur somep'n' ter the ol' mill. Stan' by an' be keerful, an', I sez, foller th' leader to the mill. Look out! here they kum."

Those in hiding in the wood perceived two forms emerge from behind the huge boulder and walk swiftly down the road in the direction contrary to that in which stood the writer and his companion. Almost at the same time, White and Billings saw the person of him who remained to, from behind the single greater stone that had before hidden him from their view, up over other rough and uneven formations, and so make his way to the tumbledown building standing among the rocks some hundred yards off.

Pursuit of the man climbing over the obstructions in his path presented, to White's mind, a problem of sufficient difficulty to afford warrant for his laying a restraining and prudent hand on his energetic companion's arm, when Billings, prompted by the depth of his interest, at once started to cross the road and stalk their prey.

"We can afford to take no chances," observed Smoky's cautious and prudent friend. "Wait; there is a plain and easy way, on this side of the road, through the wood and across the creek. The stream is dry,—all the better. We will cross the creek, cross the road and approach the mill, by way of the lane, which, you know, runs up to the mill from the road, lower down." Here, too, as White knew, would be increased protection in the thick growth of trees lining the sides of the lane. The ex-soldier's military tactics was good. The way suggested, much opposed as it was to Smoky's wishes, owing, however, mainly to loss of time,—for Smoky Billings' very nature was of the kind that gloried in the bold rush of advance and the charge, as if he had in his nostrils the scent of the battling ocean,—the course suggested, by White, for gaining the outlaw chieftain's citadel, though different from that which Billings should have liked, displayed strong strategy. In the

event of the two outlaws' unexpected return the exposed line of advance over the rocks, by which the leader of the desperadoes had gone, would, in their present unarmed position, be equivalent to suicide. The longest way around was the shortest way home. Trusting to an arrangement by which the outlaws had determined to rendezvous at the mill, and thus give an opportunity of surprising them secretly in operations solving the meaning of their present acts, White's counsels prevailed and he and Smoky proceeded cautiously to carry them out. Keeping within the concealment of the wood on their own side of the country highway, they effected a crossing of the dried stream bed in the forest; when finding all safe they crossed the road to the side on which stood the mill. Down a lane branching from the highroad they glided like spirits, silent, determined. As they neared the mill, whose weather-beaten, time-scarred face gloomed to their left in the woody lane, a light, in the old building, was seen to stream fitfully through the chinks and cracks of the place and, moving by one of its dark, gaping windows, appear to pass on to the rear of the dilapidated structure. Presently the flitting illumination was noticed, after a period of disappearance, to reappear at the back of the ruined building, where the boarding fallen off had left an opening through which not only the red flash of the flame might be seen, but the form of its carrier, as well. Here the light, and he who bore it, stopped. White, on other occasions, had visited the picturesque and interesting locality; and, familiar with the premises, at once proceeded, Billings bringing up the rear, to make his way with the utmost care to the back of the mill which, at this point, abutted directly on the dry rocky bed occupied, when full, by the mill stream. It was dark and forbidding among the lowering rocks and trees sur-

rounding the outlaws' haunts, and the presence of profuse, tangled and matted underbrush, rank and decaying soil, and broken small rock made it a matter of the extremest difficulty for the watchers of the outlaw to effect their movements with secrecy. Once Smoky stumbled, which brought him to his knees, his hand striking sharply upon a stone. This drew an involuntary though subdued exclamation of pain from the man. While a sound from the voice of the injured one could hardly have been heard in the mill, the flurry among the stones evidently was, for, through the opening left by the absence of boarding on the side of the building, the freebooter was seen to look suddenly around in some occupation engrossing his attention near the millstone, by side of which he stood, with several sheets of paper tightly clutched in his right hand. He gazed long and earnestly in the direction from whence had come the sounds that had arrested his attention. He was evidently alone.

"Hen," he called softly.

There was no response, and, doubtless, attributing the interruption to some passing wild animal of the nighttime, the outlaw appeared, once more, to devote himself to the claims of his employment.

The long impunity, in this section of the country, with which the malefactors had prosecuted their nefarious dealings had made them strangely and singularly indifferent to the ordinary comings and goings of the natives of the locality; and even Jump's seemingly curious methods of stern disguise amongst his immediate followers in crime, as well as in the necessities of his other lawless operations, bore as much relation and respect to a curious and secret desire to obscure and lose, as far as possible, consciousness of his former personality, as to any aim at escaping detection in his crim-

inal offenses. The hidden watchers could distinguish the man's features and even understand a species of muttered soliloquy with which he appeared to accompany his proceedings. The black slouch hat and huge black beard conclusively identified him as the robber chieftain familiar, in appearance, to both Smoky and William. He held, in his hand, what now appeared to White to be a written paper which, while he read, he seemed to eagerly comment upon.

White and Billings both started, at the man's low intense words—

“And shall I add the Smithin case?”

Steps were heard. The other outlaws were returning. The call of the whippoorwill was repeated thrice. The holder of the paper was no longer mistaken as to the vicinity of other than himself. William White and Smoky Billings drew back from the more exposed position they had occupied in the chance view of any approaching the spot, and, in doing so, were compelled to momentarily lose sight of the leader of the outlaws.

Several men, where two had but recently parted from Black Hand at the rock, were dimly seen approaching in the lane. The newcomers entered the ruined building, and their footsteps sounding in the echoing place to those without, they were seen, by White and Smoky, who had resumed their former point of watchfulness, to emerge into view by the side of the mysterious reader of the paper. The latter article must have been hastily secreted, for the outlaw, when next observed by the watchers, gave no evidence of its possession.

The leader of the outlaws stood facing the others. He presented a striking figure. He was short, compactly built, powerful and muscular. Accentuating his broad, black slouch hat and his great black beard, were a

coarse, dark blue flannel shirt and corduroys thrust into heavy riding boots. A large, ugly Colt's revolver was belted to his hip. His companions were dressed in various styles of rough country garb, proclaiming uncouthness and native ruffianism.

"See here," said the leader, when he had been joined by the new arrivals (who, in their disguised appearances, supplied to Smoky Billings and William White no means of identifying any two with the former occupants of the farm wagon), "I reckon ye're ter un'erstan' this here game, here an' now, fer th' las' time," the speaker had singled out one of those who had recently arrived, and addressed him with a threatening emphasis. The remaining ruffians stood aside and left their companions alone. "Fu'st, I tell ye, so's all may know, 'at we don't make no war on wimen. Ye've, all uv ye, heerd thet, afore, an' un'erstan's it ag'in." Even this redeeming trait in the strange character of Jason Jump, the Black Hank of his day, was finally lost, and, before the end and the tragic fate which at last overtook the famed outlaw, was engulfed in the abyss of misery, wretchedness and evil which swept over his agonized and tortured soul. "That, though," continued the talker, his manner assuming the appearance of a kind of rude and solemn tribune, "ain't the reel occasion uv yer bein' brung ter jestice."

"Ye've ketched me in a trap," exclaimed the man, on whom had been bestowed the robber's remarks, and manifesting his first fear in the consciousness of betrayal. He darted a quick, alarmed glance around. The dark and forbidding countenances that met his startled gaze confirmed his affrighted suspicion. His air became dogged, then propitiatory; after that, cool, defiant.

“I didn’t do nothin’ to De Braddock—on’y tried ter kiss ’er,” growled the fellow, taking a chew of tobacco.

“Yer a-waylayin’ De Braddock, t’other day,” went on the offender’s ominous judge, “hain’t the whole p’int, ez ye pufectly well knows. “Ye’re a traitor, an’ ye tried to betray us, an’ ’ware Thrash Thatcher an’ his doom—you, an’ that tramp, too, ef we ketch ’im!”

Smoky Billings, in the night without, was duly sensible of this thoughtful and expressive inclusion of himself in the outlaw’s humane intentions.

Whether the culprit before this darkling tribunal had before this been aware of the full extremity of his threatened danger or not, he here showed no departure from his previous composure. His coolness rather increased. He looked around at the stern, silent figures by which he was surrounded.

“I b’lieve,” he drawled without show of excitement, “ ’at ye killed Thrash Thatcher.”

“Bind him,” said the leader, turning to the others standing off apace.

The man who had incurred the penalty of death was near the lantern placed upon the floor. With a sudden, swift movement of the foot, he sent the light flying and the place was in darkness. Oaths, the sound of scurry-ing feet and angry and excited exclamations, in the old building, followed this bold and daring act, on the part of the endangered freebooter. White and Smoky, whose first impulse was of relief at the promised escape of the outlaw, crouched breathlessly where they were. With startling and sudden abruptness, a form, seen but vaguely in the outside obscurity, shot from a rear window of the mill and dropped silently like a plummet fully twenty feet to a sandy bar in the dry bed of the creek; and, apparently uninjured by its courageous and successful leap, sped like the wind along the channel’s

bottom in the direction of the main road, which the stream's bed traversed at no great distance from the point where the flying figure had first reached the ground. Flaming matches danced in the ruined old mill structure where, before, darkness, the result of the extinguished lantern's light, had reigned.

"They'll beat the woods," said White, "we must get away."

The suggestion was timely, for the men without heard Black Hank, with an outburst of profanity, exclaim,

"Boys, git outside. He's 'giv' us th' slip in th' dark."

The watchers could hear the dash of many feet speeding for the front of the building, while a last flashing taper showed the robber chieftain making a final hurried inspection of the premises before leaving. White and Billings had no more than time to hastily withdraw from view, when the outlaws burst into sight in the lane. They were almost immediately joined by Black Hank. At this point, however, they paused. The commotion and confusion caused by the action of their victim in kicking over the lantern had prevented any indication attracting attention to the possible exit by way of the window, and it now, for the first time, occurred to the chief of the miscreants that an escape might have been effected in that direction. Quickly ordering one of his men into the dry creek, the leader and the remaining ruffians began a rapid though systematic search of the immediate vicinity. The situation of White and Billings had now become critical. If found, they well knew what would be their instantaneous fate. There would be no trial. Sudden and swift death would be their portion. The searcher sent to the creek must pass close to their hiding place. He stumbled over the broken rocks near them. It looked as if they were safe. His foot caught;

he swerved to avoid the obstruction, and in doing so was face to face with Smoky Billings, who foreseeing the course the mishap would cause the man to take had instinctively sprung forward to silence their discoverer. Billings' powerful seaman's hold had the surprised desperado by the throat, ere the latter could make outcry, while before his captive's astonished wits could recover themselves the sailor had dealt the ruffian a blow just under the ear with his free hand clenched like a huge ball of iron, and, without a sound, the stricken man crumpled up like a leaf and sank as the victor, still grasping his throat, eased him noiselessly to the ground, in a crushed heap at his silencer's feet.

"Now, for it, Mr. White," said Smoky, seizing his companion by the arm and reaching the bank of the dry stream bed, but a few feet away, almost at the same instant. Into this they descended, finding the high embankment steep, rough and difficult.

At the bottom they crouched, for a moment, and White muttered in Smoky's ear,

"If we could only secure that paper, Billings,—what he said about 'the Smithin case:' that paper had something to do with Zeke's murder."

"Er ef we could on'y git the feller, himself. Can't be' helped, sir," rejoined Smoky Billings regretfully; "nothin' more kin be did, now."

Their danger was still imminent. At any moment those scouring the lane and its neighborhood might find reason, in the continued silence of their scout companion or the supposed necessity of uniting in a common quest, for following the outlaw whose form lay still and quiet on the rocks above. To add to their increasing danger moonrise was at hand. They stole silently down the exhausted path of the stream, keeping in the deeper obscurity of the rugged banks, and had nearly reached

the highway, when there sounded the sharp report of firearms. White was in advance, in the step it took to reach the road, and seeing no signs of human presence dashed swiftly across the way, with Smoky following, to gain the protection of the wood where, further up, they had left their horses.

"There he is," shouted a voice, as its owner caught a fleeting glimpse of Smoky's figure just disappearing among the trees, where White had succeeded in getting unseen. The outlaw quickly and threateningly reinforced his words, and his first shot at some object evidently taken in the shadows for the escaping robber, with a harmless winger at Billings.

Smoky Billings stooped, and grasping a large stone ran swiftly under cover of the wood up the creek's bank. With great force, he hurled the object in his hand far above in the stream's empty bed, where it fell clattering and echoing among its kindred rocks. He rapidly circled back and joined William White just as the latter, with a throb of alarm, had discovered his follower's absence.

"Listen," said Smoky gleefully and stealthily.

The ruse had been successful, and the outlaws were heard to turn into the creek and rush up its course in the direction of the sound which had followed Smoky's artful device.

In a comparatively unfamiliar locality, in the darkness and without arms, what could be done to secure, circumvent or thwart the miscreants? In an attempt to supply a satisfactory solution to this question, involving as it did the unexplained paper in relation to the death of Zeke Smithin, White lingered as long as possible. Reluctantly, at last he committed the interest to the future, and, obeying on Smoky's part a careful suggestion, the horses were reached.

After all, breathing more freely the two men were soon in the road, galloping away from the dangerous vicinity of their late adventures. As they made a wide detour and entered the town they had a few hours before left, the moon was flooding the earth with a wondrous glory and midnight marked the hour.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MONA WALKER, THE PRETTY HOUSEKEEPER, BRINGS BRAD SIMONS TO AN UNDERSTANDING.

Brad Simons was at breakfast. The sun was bright, in the heavens without, and nature and the world alike smiled and were beautiful. Simons gazed through the morning glory vines trained by Mona Walker over the window affording the prosperous cattle raiser and farmer a view of his fat and fertile lands beyond. He toyed with his coffee cup. The pretty housekeeper came and went, and wrinkled up her brows in an expression of thought. Unknown to the silent cattleman, she was thinking, upon somewhat different lines, of the same concerns at that moment affecting Simons' understanding. Mona Walker had for some time observed that Brad Simons was drifting dangerously near a threatening and fatal maelstrom of sentiment, which the pretty housekeeper needed no extra strength of a pretty housekeeper's powers of divination to perceive was Simons' relations to De Braddock. Mona was not pleased. She had long been led to suppose that Brad intended making herself his blameless and efficient wife.

Simons mused aloud.

"I've plenty. I could settle something on Mona,— she'll give me trouble on that marriage promise, if I don't. Wonder what that scoundrel Jump did with it, anyway? But, I've plenty — plenty. I'm rich. If I could get the wife I want, I could easily afford to spend the balance of my life enjoying myself. We could

travel, too—go abroad. De Braddock is a woman of intellect—” and the dreaming man was once more silent.

Mona Walker, standing in an adjoining room, the door of which opening into the eating room stood ajar, lingered with an intent and listening expression on her pleasing face as Simons was heard to fall into his musing soliloquy. The housekeeper, with discreet art, said nothing, as she gathered the full meaning of the stock raiser’s words. Like a very wise, as well as a very good looking young woman, she went about the further supplies for her sentimental employer’s morning meal.

“Mr. Simons,” said a voice—a musical and perfectly respectful voice—at length breaking in upon Brad’s happy reverie.

Simons turned in his seat.

In an attitude of quiet self possession, Mona Walker stood facing him.

“Did you speak?” asked Simons as, gazing a trifle blankly at the young woman, he came out of his dreams in much the same way as any other dreamer comes out of his. The magic of Mona’s wonderful oriole of burnished, glowing hair still worked its witchery in Simons’ blood.

“Yes, I spoke,” simply replied the woman, with a touch of dignity, “and I would thank you to listen to me, a moment, if you have the time to spare,” the speaker expressed herself much as anyone having a matter which only required presentation to secure approval and adoption would have spoken.

Bradford Simons very graciously unbent and informed his housekeeper that he would be pleased to hear her statement.

“You are not going to marry De Braddock,” with startling abruptness, announced Mona Walker, while

maintaining her demeanor of quiet conviction as to Simon's acceptance and endorsement of her views.

Had two or three of the bombshells plentifully hurled about like footballs, a little before that time, by a number of mistaken players both north and south in the game of war, fallen from the sky, through Brad's roof and ceilings, and landed upon the coffee cup poised, in the cattle dealer's hand, under the cattle dealer's nose in the act of drinking, there could hardly have been a more startling and more convincing result. The cup of coffee was set down so violently in its saucer by the surprised forces of Mr. Simons' mental fortress, that the hot coffee was flung wildly up like the eruption of the famous crater at Petersburg during our Civil Controversy, and the saucer, with a shock, was split in two where a previous crack had rendered it especially susceptible to this mode of concussion.

The pretty housekeeper, to keep the embattled simile alive another moment, stood and watched the havoc wrought by the enemy's shell, with a touch of growing scorn and contempt lighting up her pretty and expressive features; and at last said, as quietly as ever:

"Your temper is quite as masterful as usual."

"What do you mean—what do you mean?" choked and spluttered the stock raiser, getting red in the face—"what," he stammered, as he gradually recovered speech, "I say, do you mean?"

"Your infatuation for De Braddock, who is too good for you, by the way, has added a touch of mental derangement to your naturally angelic disposition," replied Mona with agreeable irony. "Now, Mr. Simons, when, through a wholly unaccountable impulse, I consented to leave school teaching and become your housekeeper, I did not do it with any intention of permitting the superior money considerations you offered me to take

charge of your home blind me to certain other rights I have entertained by reason of promises entered into, on your part, in regard to yourself and myself. It is unfortunate that the written agreement to marry me was stolen from the bank, but you are *not* going to marry De Braddock."

The full, rotund visage of Simons wore the appearance of about to usher in an apoplectic fit upon its full blooded and high tempered possessor.

Wholly undisturbed. Mona looked on with a smiling and amused face.

Finally, his sudden attack of spleen seeming to subside, the stockman composed somewhat his distorted and working countenance.

"As you say," he, at length, managed to articulate thickly, "these attacks of temper will drive me beside myself, some day; in which event," added the man with a wicked look at the laughing woman, "take care!—oh, you needn't laugh,—I'd do it, in a minute," said he, giving tongue to some unuttered and deadly thought, "I would."

At this, the woman burst into a peal of laughter, that sounded over the house and smote the hearer with its note of sharp defiance. The man glared impotently for a moment at the form beside him, and went on,

"This temper'll be the death of me," and panting, with a quick seizure of shortness of breath and vertigo, he dragged and tugged at his collar, while the house-keeper coolly and unconcernedly handed him a glass of water.

Simons drank some of the water, and set the glass on the table.

"Now!" presently said Simons, gazing into the calm and serene face of the woman, and referring, as the

housekeeper well knew, to his purpose with regard to De Braddock; "how are you going to prevent it?"

"That I shall not tell you," replied the other, as though, notwithstanding, the ways and means were securely fixed upon; "but I have this, also, Mr. Simons, to say,—De Braddock cares no more for you than my little finger, and William White—"

Mona paused, with really an instinct of alarm, at the sudden and renewed evidence of Simons' fit of rage.

"I'll kill him," hoarsely articulated the livid man.

"There, there," said the housekeeper, as she might have spoken to a spoiled child,—“no you won't.”

"I'll kill him, and I'll kill you," cried the man, his face working violently.

"I repeat," retorted the woman, gazing with a strong, steady look into Simons' face, "that you'll do nothing of the kind. You'll kill neither William White nor myself. But I'll say this to end the matter, that De Braddock loves William White, and she'll marry him," and the speaker quietly left the room.

Simons, alone, with his face turned in the direction of the departing housekeeper, stared in a fascinated gaze at the open door by which she had effected her decisive not to say satisfactory exit. How long he would have remained in this attitude, had he not been disturbed, it would be impossible to say. The sound of voices in the yard without aroused him, and muttering,

"Those d—n drovers," he rose from the breakfast table, and passed out of the house. As he left the breakfast room, he, a second time, muttered to himself, with deeper and more enduring oaths and an emphasis there was no mistaking:

"I'll do it—and, if she pushes me, I'll do her. But, by G—! I'll do White," and, with this ominous threat, Simons was seen to draw apart with his villainous look-

ing assistants, in a manner, that, had its import been known, would have been found to bode no good to William White.

Another had come into the yard besides the drovers. That other was Parson Woods, pausing for a neighborly call in passing, and especially conferring his visit upon Mona Walker, in whom the minister had lately displayed a deep and growing professional if not personal interest; and been gratified to find that interest not wholly objectionable to the fair and intelligent object of it.

Brad, Brad! could you but be warned, in time.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A TREACHEROUS AND MURDEROUS ASSAULT.

White, in dressing gown and slippers, was sitting, one evening, alone, in his room. Cozy quarters, by the joint aid of the feminine tact and taste of Widow Walmsey and his own inclinations, had been fitted up for the toiling and faithful writer's accommodation. The apartment was upon the second floor and was large and roomy. A lighted lamp rested upon a comfortable writing table. A bookcase, containing a few select volumes supplying an author's wants, took up a narrow width of wall to the right of the table. The room possessed a neat home made carpet known, singularly with a popular phase of modern music, as the rag variety; and an old fashioned, high four-post bedstead, in a corner of the apartment, was appointed with clean white linen, together with the old time piece-quilt counterpane. Here and there upon his walls, the young bachelor had magazine prints of the day—one of a horse—another of a boat race,—still another of a fashionably dressed and dashing young woman of the period, who was enjoyably dislocating her spine in a "Grecian bend," a fascinating and appealing pose of the day delightfully corresponding to the equally "fetching" "kangaroo hump" of our more modern sanity. On the wall, above his writing table, was a framed miniature of De. Beneath the latter, White had arranged his several different kinds of pipes—a long stemmed white English clay—a churchwarden—side by side with a plain American cob; and, blending

with its less costly neighbors, a handsome meerschaum, a present from De Braddock, reared its carved lion's crest from the center of the group of smoker's solaces.

The night was warm; the windows were up, and the smell of the country evening filled the room.

The door opened and Smoky Billings hurriedly entered.

"Cap'n," exclaimed Billings, who was quite pale, "there's a feller, down stairs, 'at says a accident's happened to Peter Braddock an' Miss De."

"What!—where?" cried White, springing to his feet.

"Down the road. Hosses run off," answered Smoky Billings, displaying an excitement and concern equal to if not exceeding White's own.

"Are they hurt?" queried the literary man, anxiously seeking for his coat, hat and shoes.

"Can't tell. Feller kind o' dumb headed," Smoky replied, hastily assisting William White in his rapid arrangements, drawing off the writer's dressing gown, and supplying, in general, the missing arm.

"Get my horse," finally said White, running from the room and down stairs, where, followed by Billings, he found the messenger who had brought the distracting tidings of mischance.

The fellow, slouchy, rough, with an unmistakably evil cast of the eye, and a mouth about which streams of tobacco juice, from time to time, had left plentiful traces of irrigation, stood silently waiting in the dooryard without.

"What it is, Bill?" cried White, recognizing the man as a well known character about the vicinity.

"They're dumped," replied Bill speaking with what might have appeared to White, under any other circumstances, a singularly evasive and furtive look,—

"they're dumped in thuh road below," the speaker threw out his arm to the south to indicate that somewhere in that direction Uncle Peter Braddock and the object of White's heart's best affections were in trouble.

"How'd it happen?" White's next question following, as he reappeared from the house where he had been after a customary and forgotten weapon.

"Comin' up frum town, ye see—" said the man, when Smoky Billings, who, with almost incredible despatch, had saddled William White's horse for him, was at the gate interrupting the messenger's speech.

"Come!" exclaimed the writer, vaulting into the saddle; "we'll talk on the go."

"I'll come, Mr. White," cried Smoky, "if I kin git a hoss."

White contented himself with nodding his head quickly, and sat on his horse impatiently waiting for the messenger to untie his own animal and mount.

As Billings' employer and the latter's mounted companion broke into a gallop down the road, Smoky moved swiftly in the direction of the fields adjoining Widow Walmsey's little patch of land.

Where Smoky Billings got a horse, that night, is not known; though, doubtless, among the loose stock in the neighboring pastures he managed to find a mount; and, without saddle or bridle,—having but a rope halter with which to guide the animal,—Billings was not long in following his friend and chief.

"Pretty tough looking customer, that," thought Smoky, expressing to himself an opinion of the messenger, and urging his horse, which happened to be but a fairly good animal, to as great a rate of speed as it was capable of in his efforts to overtake the fleeter progress of the two horsemen ahead.

"How much farther, Bill?" asked De's old lover, following some time of swift and silent riding.

"Jes' aroun' the bend beyon' the run crossin' ther road, at Stoner's grove," replied the other, meaning that they were bound for a point beyond a turn in the highway a little distance after crossing a small stream now not far from where they then were.

"See Simons, lately?" inquired the literary man, obeying, in the asking of this seemingly singularly timed question, a prompting difficult to explain.

Bill looked startled.

"Uh—uh—" he stuttered, in, to White's sense, a most unusual manner.

White glanced at him curiously.

"What's the matter?" asked the writer.

"Nothin'," returned the other hastily. "Seen 'im—Simons—t'other day," continued the man scowling, with what seemed a look of lowering suspicion, out of the corner of his eye, at the rider moving rapidly at his side. "There's the place," he growled, as a thick grove of beech came in sight.

They were galloping on a stretch of road bordered by cornfields and, now and then, clumps of trees close to the roadside. The way was level and ran so until, entering more extended pieces of wood on either side, it declined in a gentle slope, when it crossed a small brook—fed, in drought, by a celebrated mineral spring in that locality—and which traversed the highway at right angles. At this point, the gloom was deeper than at others, the trees growing close to the roadside almost forming an arch overhead and tending to obscure what meager light came from the stars.

As the two approached the wood, William White, to whom every object in that vicinity was as familiar as day, was affected by a strange thrill of unaccountable

apprehension at the somber and forbidding aspect of the dark opening showing between the sides of the tree lined way, like the mouth of a tunnel, where their own course plunged into the denser timber.

Slightly in advance of his companion, White here entered the stretch which ran through the grove. The hard riding man took no notice, or he would have seen the faithless messenger silently rein in his horse and disappear among the trees at the roadside. The writer had reached the edge of the small stream crossing the highway, and his horse had placed a forefoot in the water, with a jerking decline of the head in an effort to reach a drinking place, when, from the right, a quick flash cut the night, and, breaking the silence of the wood, a shot rang out. White heard the vicious zing of a bullet, so familiar to the ex-soldier's ears, go by so close to his head that he felt the brush of air as the missile fanned his cheek. The horse reared wildly with fright, and the rider taken by surprise was thrown from the animal's back. The unhorsed man landed upon the soft earth at the margin of the creek. He was instantly upon his feet, uninjured save for a bruise or two and a thorough shaking up. As White rose, the horse, loosed from his master's hand, bounded into the stream and, dashing through the water, went careering madly up the road, where turning a bend the animal was lost to sight.

The ex-soldier instinctively felt for his revolver. It had been lost upon the road. Struggling to his feet, he mechanically grasped a large stone, now his only weapon. He swiftly and searchingly scanned the wood in front of him, whence had seemed to come the report of the gun. He saw no one. For the first time, White became conscious of the absence of Bill. He turned, twisting, stooped and dodging to escape further fire, and

made for the trees in his rear. The semi darkness greatly favored his escape.

As the writer started to seek shelter, he heard someone, who had evidently emerged into the open road behind him, cry,

“Ketch him, boys, ner he’ll gin’ us ther slip.”

White was fleetly covering the few paces between himself and the friendly cover at the roadside, when his footing slipped, and he came near falling. As he wheeled and straightened, one man was at him. Two more were coming from the wood across the way. The first ruffian held, clubbed above his head, a squirrel rifle. He brought it down with terrific force. White sprang nimbly to one side, and the gun carried on by the tremendous momentum which it had received struck the ground, the fierce impact breaking the stock and dashing the formidable instrument from the owner’s grasp. White struck the man a crushing blow on the head with the stone he still held, stunning and knocking his assailant down. The others sprang at the one armed soldier. The latter’s one weapon had loosened and flown from his fingers.

As has been somewhere before remarked, William White was very muscular and an athlete, having trained extensively in his college days, and he put forth all his strength and skill. His one arm shot straight from the shoulder at the approaching leader of the two remaining miscreants. His fist caught the object of his blow squarely upon the tip of the chin and dropped the fellow like a log. In the language of the ring, it was a “knock out,” and the man lay without consciousness. The writer now had but one to deal with, but the latter, profiting by the instant of time taken in the defeat of his last companion, threw himself upon the assaulted man, and clasping him with both arms about the body, fast-

ened White's one arm to his side, leaving the captive like a trussed and skewered fowl awaiting roasting. The ensuing struggle was a fierce one mixed with oaths from White's antagonist, who, different from his silent foe, was thus badly "winding" himself; but whose arms, encircling the writer, seemed, to the latter, to bind like iron about his ribs. The pinioned victim maintained an unbroken silence. At last, by a nearly superhuman effort, he succeeded in getting his one arm free from the other's embrace, and instantly darted the liberated hand at the brawny neck of his foe. It is said, and with equal truth, that the power of any lost member of the human body goes into its surviving mate. White's strength of arm seemed to partake of the nature of that of a giant—a Hercules. The disguise worn in common with the others by his present opponent, at this moment, fell from the latter's face, and the one armed fighter recognized the man who had decoyed him hither. The ruffian's familiar and malignant features were all that were necessary to inflame the sight and deadly determination of the maddened soldier to a final pitch of unrelenting death.

The athletic writer was panting,—as he fastened his fingers in his assailant's throat, every muscle in his own body swelling; the other, likewise, was beginning to show punishment.

"So, Bill, it's you, is it?" said White shutting his teeth, and concentrating all his power in the grip of his fingers, until the wretch in his grasp gasped for breath. Faint and dying, the choking man loosened his hold upon his antagonist's body and, with both hands, clutched at his adversary's fingers closed in a deathlike grip upon his throat. As the man's hands sought White's grasp, the latter, with a quick movement of his right foot learned in his wrestling days at college, trip-

ped his foe, and the ruffian went down with a crash. The man attempted to rise. White threw himself upon him, and again bore him to the earth where, once more fastening his hold in the man's throat, he slowly compressed it until the fellow's tongue protuded from his mouth. Try as the latter would, he found himself unable to loosen those hooks of steel pressing out his life. The fixed and immovable strength of the practiced athlete was pinning the writhing man to the earth like, when a death-dealing transfix is passed through the body of an insect, it is held in eternal rigor and fate.

White's prostrate foe was rapidly losing consciousness beneath the iron pressure of the writer's grip, when one of the two who had been previously disabled, slowly recovering his senses, rose to his elbow. He gazed about him. With an oath, he perceived the victorious man kneeling upon the body of his accomplice, and staggered to his feet.

The sound of galloping horses came faintly from up the road. White saw the last man gain his footing. He felt his own strength, great as it had been, had reached its limit. He shouted,

“Murder!”

As the newly risen ruffian made a lunge to reach his foe, the latter involuntarily uprose to meet his new assailant, and left Bill lying still and motionless upon the earth.

The sound of galloping horses grew louder.

And the two were locked in a death struggle. White was down—now up, and the other underneath—then they rolled over upon the ground, and White's opponent was on top.

Clearer and louder sounded the horses' feet upon the hardened roadway.

White had no breath to spare. He heard the hoof-beats, and tugged and strained at his foe.

Two riders dashed upon the scene.

They leaped from their horses, and Smoky Billings, who, by chance, had been joined by Bob Likkum, seized the man struggling with the hard pressed writer, while Likkum sprang at another rising from the ground. The latter turned and fled into the woods. Deeming it unadvisable to follow, Likkum assisted White to his feet, where the "hero of the fray" stood recovering his breath.

Billings coolly proceeded to attend to the man just deposed from his seat of power on William White's chest.

White slowly regaining powers of speech, and Likkum watching him do it, Bill very prudently slipped away, serpentwise wriggling upon his stomach off among the trees, having unnoticed, in part, revived from the effects of the deadly throttling received from his late adversary. There was a moment of disorder, as the murderous ruffian was seen to disappear in the wood, and taking advantage of it, Smoky Billings' captive broke from the detaining grasp of Smoky, first hitting that much surprised gentleman smartly upon the head, thereby confusing his ideas greatly.

The three assailants of White had escaped.

Bill was never, again, seen in that locality.

Brad Simons had played and lost.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SUBTLE SKEIN IN THE WARP AND WOOF THAT FATE WILL
EVER WEAVE—IS EVER WEAVING. A DOUBT. NANCE
AND DE. JOHN BRADDOCK'S SISTER YIELDS
TO BRAD SIMONS.

It is but fair to say, that De Braddock was still in a state of great doubt and anxiety over her brother's coming trial for the murder of Zeke Smithin, to which she had been wrought up by the remark of White in the jail, that someone must be found to testify to an *alibi* for John. Put the matter as she would, it always recurred to the same point of view: Anyone who could supply such aid, and did not, would be guilty of the possible destruction of her brother. To increase the confusion of her understanding, the additional fact insinuated itself,—that, whatever might be the truth or falsity of the evidence given in court to clear her brother, it would still place upon him or her, refusing to give it, the responsibility of consigning the jeopardized man to a fate wholly beyond her terrified powers of comprehension. De could be brave as to her own welfare, but she trembled and even magnified terrors, like many another courageous and loving soul, when the well being of those, who hold warm and abiding place in the heart, is at stake. Simons had been untiring and persistent, and only waited what seemed to him a suitable opportunity to disclose some definite plan of succor for John, and thus afford himself a reason for finally claiming her discharge of their tacit agreement of marriage. Thus wrenched in

her love for her brother, she spent many a sleepless night over her brooding cares and fears. The deeper dye of the red rose left her cheek, and the way looked dark enough, without the inevitable and unwelcome reappearance of the scheming and detestable Brad Simons himself upon the scene.

It was but accident that, again, brought her and Brad together in the little town of T——.

So sensitive was De's conscience, religious and otherwise, that, when Simons said to her, "An *alibi* De, and I am looking for one,—an *alibi* is what is wanted, now, most of all—an *alibi* to clear John," De fell into renewed trembling, and the doubt and perplexity of her mind reached its climax. "An *alibi*!"—should no other one but herself be found, would she not have to be the witness to one? The delicacy of her nature had restrained her, up to this time, from communicating the filmy vagaries and uncertainties of her secret hopes and dreads to even William White himself; from whom, in the high esteem in which the girl held him, unconsciously the original suggestion now animating her thoughts to the exclusion of all else had emanated, at the time of their visit to the jail. If she had dreamed, in her own personal evidence, of manufacturing the testimony that would rescue John Braddock from his threatened danger, the thought had been one of such gravity to her acute and super-inflamed condition of mind that she had scarcely permitted herself to acknowledge to her own soul, much less to another's, the enormity of such a course.

And here was Brad Simons—one looking actively, in her distinct knowledge and his own statement just made to her, for that the very want of which was occasioning her such insupportable unrest. Brad, in this way, came, at once, into the zone of her entire maiden confidences.

But when Nance Braddock, John's wife, who was in T—— on account of both her husband and brother, was seen by De near the little country tavern, John Braddock's distracted sister welcomed a respite from a final plunge into those deep waters of casuistry and subtle seeming conventional wrong that right might be. Hastily excusing herself, therefore, to Brad, she hurried after Nance, grasping at the unusual personality of her brother's wife like a drowning creature at a straw. Nance, too, was painfully conscious of the irregular in her own relations of life, owing to the singularity of her marriage with John Braddock.

"I think you are a true wife and a good, honest, loving mother," said De impulsively to Nance Braddock, as the two saddened and sorrowing women lingered seeking mutual sympathy and comfort; "and I feel the same for you, dear, as I would for a sister of my own."

Misery loves company; adversity unites.

The words of De had been called forth by poor humble Nance's deprecation of her marriage to John, out of which had grown the incriminating threat, by her husband, against the life of Zeke Smithin.

"And you are not ashamed of me?" rejoined Nance, gazing wistfully into De's lovely face.

"Oh! why should I be?" cried the other from the depth of her own great trouble.

"But, dear sister,—may I call you so?" appealingly asked the wife of De's brother.

"You may, indeed."

"Sister, can you understand the scorn of women for the kind who have been unfortunate? Can you," said the woman with timid hesitancy in the presence of the girl, "know the burning contempt they bestow upon such and take pleasure in the pain they have caused—the joy with which they cast your sorrows, misery and

suffering in your very face? Can you—you cannot—no, you cannot,” cried the woman, “know the heart that breaks under the loads of slights and sneers and cruelty that human beings heap on those who are found to have fallen in their path! May you never know—may God be thanked that you do not!”

De, for a moment, was silent under the merited reproach and judgment upon humanity, in these words from her sex. And the woman before her looked not to the past alone, when, unwedded, this exclusion from human sympathy and support, in the great struggle of life, existed without stint or check; but no change, no alteration of state wherein the voice of wifely fidelity and maternal worth was heard perfect and complete appeared to plead for the once erring, extenuate the offense, conciliate or reconcile the virtuous in the pitiful failings of our fallen, infirm kind made to stumble, fall, rise and try again.

Let them without ill, reject those with it!

While Nance Braddock and De were thus engaged, Parson Woods came up; and Peter Braddock's daughter, without delay or explanation, announced that she and Nance were starting on a visit to Nance's brother Tom. Parson Woods cordially expressed a desire to accompany the two women; and the three, at once, made their way around to the jail, at no great distance from the hotel.

“Maybe, here,” thought De, “something might be learned from Tom Bolers, that would offer a way to what she sought—her brother's release from unmerited suspicion.”

At the jail, they were met by the sheriff, who quickly showed them to Tom's cell.

Tom Bolers stood upon one side of the grated door shutting him in, and Nance and John's sister and good and worthy Parson Woods, his face shining with benevo-

lence and christian charity, stood, in the narrow hallway, on the other side.

Tom had allowed his beard to grow, and a coarse, profuse and unkempt effect of whiskers, together with a head of disheveled hair and a generally neglected person, gave the imprisoned object within the barred cell the aspect of some strange specimen of wild animal peering out upon a group of casual visitors and sightseers. Whether the cause of these impressions was affected by similar fancies, raging inwardly against captivity, or whether the helpless captive accepted his fate like a subdued wild beast, and callous to all absence of power to control any other condition, is, perhaps, outside the province of this narrative to say. It is highly probable that we are kindly and wisely adapted, in a special, singular and inscrutable providence, to the states to which we are called, and so adapted upon the beneficent principle propounded in the beautiful thought of Lawrence Sterne:

“The Lord tempers the wind to the shorn lamb!”

“Tom,” said Nance softly and gently, as the brother, with each hand above his head, holding a bar, placed his face between his elbows, and stood looking at those without, “what have you done to bring this new trouble upon us?”

The man, in silence, gazed stolidly, one might almost have said uncomprehendingly, upon the little knot of people in front of him.

“Bolers,” added Parson Woods, “it is not necessary, when you see who are here, to say that we come as friends, my poor fellow, and,” pursued the speaker, “it is with the deepest wish to help, serve you in any and all ways, that your friends and sister are here. No matter, Thomas,” continued Woods fervently, the rest giving way in profound respect to the remarks of the

preacher who, in common with others, had concluded that Tom was guilty,—“no matter,” repeated Woods, “what the offense, what the deed, what the heart of crime, there is always mercy in God!”

The prisoner maintained a dogged silence.

“Tom, can you tell us how this trouble about Zeke Smithin happened?” said Parson Woods in a tone of kind insistence.

Bolers' look of stolid immobility took on a slow and labored change. He glanced from one to the other of the party before his cell, with something like the dawn of an intelligent comprehension growing in his face. His eyes rested longest, as was natural, upon the face of his sister, Nance. The queer, cunning scrutiny in the look of the man, for it seemed nothing less than cunning, flitted from the face of Nance to that of De. As the glance of the man behind the bars rested upon the countenance of the sister of his brother-in-law John Braddock, a slight gleam, one might almost have thought of remorseful recollection, trembled for a single instant in his eye and was, in that instant, gone. No one can say how deeply the memory of kindness, done him by John Braddock, may have actuated the feelings of Tom, at this moment, or what might have been the secretly regretted realization of impending disaster to John and John's own which some past act of Bolers' was likely to precipitate. None, let us hope, are without an instinct dormant or otherwise for good.

“Parson,” said the man, calmly, “ye know I ain't no saint, but gamblin's the worst in this case.”

“You do not know, then,” queried Woods, “who assaulted—killed—Zeke Smithin?”

“Nary, do I,” replied the prisoner in a positive manner and with an air of perfect truth.

“But the marked money, Tom,—you were known to

have it; the money that the faro dealer swears was that which, on the occasion of the play and large winnings of Zeke Smithin, the faro dealer gave to Zeke; how do you account for that?"

"Ye don't account fur the birds, nur they to you fur their nests," answered Tom enigmatically.

"Tom—Tom," said the parson sadly, turning from the grating, "you know more of this business, than you choose to tell," and the parson, who had naturally a humane heart and a head that, had it discovered any beneficent and unemployed power of creed, would have hastened to apply it, moved, with a pained gesture, back and to one side, and remained talking, in low-voiced sentences, with the sheriff.

De had not spoken since the entrance of herself and the others into the jail. She had been a patient and attentive listener to all that had passed. It was not apparent in her manner, whether she considered Tom innocent or guilty of the crime laid at his and John's door,—doubtless, it was sufficient for her to feel thoroughly satisfied of the impossibility of her brother's guilt in such an affair. Nevertheless, De's thoughts had not been idle. She stepped to the bars and placed a hand in tender sympathy upon one of the prisoner's roughened, soil-begrimed own.

"Tom," said the genuine and great-hearted girl, her voice thrilling with compassion, "I pity you from the bottom of my heart. If you are unjustly charged, all I ask is, do mend your ways in the other concerns of your life, should you ever be at liberty again. Do not think that all are hard-hearted, Tom," pursued De, "or do not wish you to be happy and free. There are those who still love you, be you what you may, and wish you well.—But, O Tom,—Tom, cannot you help John?"

For a minute, the man, whose silence to all question-

ing, beyond his assertion that he had won the incriminating money at play, might be seriously compromising another, and that other this woman's brother,—for a minute, the imprisoned man appeared to struggle with an effort to speak, working under the influence of the powerful and magnetic kindness of De's voice and speech. His lips parted. That was all. The next moment, he was as taciturn as ever. After a time spent by the brother and sister in such communion as Nancee, prompted by a sincere affection, could promote between the two, John Braddock's wife proposed a dissolution of the meeting. They, then, departed, as wise concerning the Smithin murder as they had come, leaving Tom Bolers, with his hands above his head, still holding the bars of his cell door, and his face still peering out at them from between his elbows.

And Brad Simons, again, came to John's sister, and, this time, in utter hopelessness and abandon, she poured forth her soul.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE KENTUCKY MAN TAKES A NEW LEASE ON LIFE.

Bob Likkum, on a day set apart by him for a special trip over to town, stopped his democrat and roan at the rustie dwelling place of Ann Mariah Saunders, and alighted at the door of her vine-covered cottage.

Ann was on the lookout, arrayed in a spotless gown, and came forth, this morning, to greet Bob as the latter advanced to the door. Bob was going to drive her to town by previous and careful mutual arrangement.

"Whoa!" shouted Likkum, turning sharply to the roan, that animal making evident signs of distress in the rattling shafts of the democrat and the stamping of roan feet; "them hossflies is pow'rful," commented Ann's escort, after returning from the slaughter of one of the aforesaid insects that had settled, with murderous intent, upon the flank of the suffering roan; "don't know what I'll do."

"Be pretty sassy," assented the dutiful Ann Mariah, looking very sweet and submissive.

"Do declare they be," repeated Likkum,—"*them* there pesky little varmints is more bother'n taxes. Drive weth me over ter town, Ann?" and Bob, as though he had just thought of it, paused without entering the house.

"B'lieve I shall," said the coy maiden, as if for the first time the idea had presented itself to her own mind.

The democrat presently rattled off with Ann and Bob, the roan knowingly cocking his ears when he neared

a double row of thick and screening hazel bushes through which the road ran. As democrat and burden whisked briskly in between the hiding curtains of hazel shrubbery, the experienced roan very slyly closed one eye (was the action caused by another horsefly?) and only opened the same upon emerging from the cozy lane of hazels, at the other end, when a masculine arm withdrew from Ann Mariah's waist and the vehicle arrived in the open road simultaneously.

"Don't look," remarked Bob, "much 's if go'n' to hev' rain," and fell silent from conversational exhaustion.

"No," said Ann and, likewise, collapsed.

"Think Job'll do it?" asked Bob in a most startlingly irrelevant and wholly incomprehensible sentence. In view of Likkum's comments on the rain, it might have been thought that the junior Saunders had, since our last meeting with him and the guitar at Widow Walmsey's, been transformed, by some miraculous process, into the character of rain producer for that region.

Even gentle Ann Mariah was, for the moment, shocked into a state of suspense, involved with a little creeping shuddering sensation of doubt, lest her usually cool-headed cavalier had suddenly abandoned his senses to the surrounding spaces of his "native heath." She peered anxiously up into Bob Likkum's stolid and expressionless face.

"Do what, Robert?" she asked in mild and timid surprise.

"The widder," answered Bob, in unconscious double meaning, his reply being solely of that laconic and brief nature, which merely means to suggest, without unnecessary waste of time or verbiage, by the use of one leading word of a subject a natural and inevitable trend of subsequent ideas.

"Oh!" faintly exclaimed the enlightened lady at Bob's side. She had perceived her companion's meaning to be, "would her lazy and idle brother Job secure the matrimonial prize offered in the equally unprovided for Widow Walmsey?"

"I hope not," further, and in tones almost as inaudible as before, breathed Ann.

Robert had felt, in his previous observation, something akin to an absurd impulse of sympathy for Job, and experienced the corresponding douche of ice-water effect conveyed in poor Ann's feeble response.

"Ye hain't got much feelin' fer lovers!" rebuked Bob, in about the most lugubrious attempt at sportive raillery ever heard.

"Oh, Robert," sighed the martyr in the democrat, "I have to support—the little place," apologetically amended Ann, "has to support Job and me," her unfinished intended remark was the correct one,—she had to support herself and Job, as her brother never, under any possible pretext, was known to put upon himself the dishonor of work,—“I have to support us both,” said Ann Mariah breaking down completely, in both her innocent, original subterfuge to shield the worthless Job, and in her emotions, as well; “what, oh! Bob, what would become of us, if—”

“Shan't be,” said Likkum, making unavailing efforts to stem the flood of his own emotions, angry, sorrowful and otherwise,—“shan't be, I tell ye,—Job shan't,—selfish, orn'ry feller—won't allow it, nohow, I won't,” which meant that Bob, upon realizing the possible miseries likely to result from “selfish, orn'ry” Job Saunders bringing the additional responsibility of Widow Walmsey upon the already sufficiently strained Saunders' resources, had entered a wholesome protest

against Job making the spectacle of himself pictured in Ann Mariah's uncontrollable and spontaneous plaint.

And yet, until Ann could provide another nurse for the infant(?) "Jobie," how could she be expected to forsake the anchor of her duty to her flesh and blood, as "orn'ry" as, in the depths of truth, that flesh and blood was, and "cleave unto" Robert Likkum? That was what rubbed Bob the wrong way, unless—?

"Heaven," thought Bob, "forbid! marry and enjoy Joberius's society in perpetuity? Flee, boys, flee, flee for your lives," finished Robert silently, in a burst of inspiration of a decidedly expressive, original and brilliant nature.

"Robert," fluttered the bird that felt the nestful promptings at the side of her mate, "father might come home, and rich," and Ann Mariah, after this final and exhaustive demand upon her hopeful and imaginative powers, sank into a silence too dense and profound to be even affected by Likkum's,

"Oh! Lord," groaned in the depths of despair over the old, familiar reference to the derelict senior Saunders, and, by his offspring, his confidently expected return in wealth to his needy kinsfolk.

The balance of the ride to the town of T—— was consumed by the joltings of the democrat, sundry efforts, on Bob's part, to "git," as he put it to himself, "a bearin' on the subjeck," and, finally, by a harmonious readjustment of the mutual feelings of Ann and Bob, much to the apparent approval and satisfaction of the roan, who testified his appreciation of the clearer state of the sentimental atmosphere by a loud and gallant neigh, while passing a pert and wonderingly staring mare in an adjoining field.

And Bob took up the rest of Ann Mariah's time and pleasure with the Likkum version, so famous in the

Wabash country, of the story of "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp," and, as will be clearly perceived, introduced by Ann's devoted swain with telling force and effect relating to politics, and of much interest in existing political fitness.

"One't," said Bob, "upon a time, in them days uv long ago, they existed a majishun what, it is thinked, wuz like one uv our modern rich Creesuses," (the entertainer, it may be said, in the briefest possible interruption of Likkum's undeniable attractions as a story teller, lived before the latter day Trust magnate summoned the genii of fabled wealth to do his bidding; but there were rich men in Bob's time, too,) "and," continued Robert, "this here majishun wuz mos' discontented with his poor, small means, and aspired to be a gentleman of, at least, enough to keep ther wolf frum ther door, ez he had on'y erbout a few milliuns. Well, this majishun, he went to a young man some'er's in Chiny an' he sez, 'I'd like,' he sez, 'ef yer'll do me the lastin' favor,' he sez, 'to b'lieve I'm yer kind, tender hearted, long lost uncle,' he sez, 'an' go an' git me that 'air lamp.' An' the young man, w'at didn't hev' no other biz'ness in life but fur ter b'lieve anythin' what wuz said to him by any man wantin' to increase his few paltery little milliuns, he sez to the wicked majishun, he sez: 'All right, ole cock,' he sez, sez the young man; an' the purtended uncle, fur to reconcile his unfort'nate doop (dupe) to his a-proachin' fate, bought him a suit uv clothes, fur the young man wuz needin' 'em; an' ther wicked and wily majishun, mos' gen'rous and flatterin', informed the overpowered and pleas-ed young feller, that the same young feller wuz cert'nly one of the most intel'junt and enlightened voters in the country; and the young feller said, after that, 'at he'd git his gen'r'us relative the lamp, er help send him ter congress, er anything

else, an' he got his uncle ther lamp; an' the young man got it in the neek, and couldn't git out uv the cave, his uncle put him in, 'cause uv the job the wicked majishun had set up on him. So the young man got what the feller shot at; and the majishun, he overreached hisself, like the politishun, an' he got nuthin', nuther; 'cause the young man was shet up in the cave weth the lamp, an' couldn't get out, nary. And ther pertended uncle, ther wicked majishun, he'd lost ther combination; and, arter hollerin' aroun' on ther outside uv the cave fur a while, he quit an' went away." Robert Likkum looked to see if his listener in the democrat had survived thus far, and found much to his satisfaition, that Ann's eyes were sparkling with interest and childlike pleasure. Considerably refreshed and encouraged, Bob proceeded. "So, the wicked majishun," in high feather pursued the narrator, "went away mean; and the young man was left to hold the sack; and the young feller, at the end of a inkredible time alive wethout eatin', rubs a ring the majishun 'd let him into,—or, at least, like the politishun, one little finger,—and it shows the young man how deep they've got 'im in the hole—whole ring," added Likkum unable to resist the temptation; "an' the giunt jeeny w'at comes at the beehest uv the ring tells the young man he got ter get inter another ring, or no," said Bob, correcting himself adroitly, "not another ring, tho' the same thing,—the young man's referred up to the nex' boss fur favors. An' the young man, he rubs the lamp, and, this time, the head jeeny uv all rings, he comes a-bowin', and a-salaamin', an' a-serapin', an' a-boviatin' aroun', and he sez, sez he, 'W'at would yer be pleased fur to want?' and the wuntime doop of the politishun—no, I mean the wicked majishun—the wuntime doop, he sez, sez he, 'Have I the honor uv a-gittin' a-hold,' sez he, 'uv the power behin' the throne,' sez he,

'w'at my frien', the wicked majishun, he wanted fur ter make me the innercent an' onconshus tool fur ter git fur himself?' sez the young man; an' ther jeeny, he sez, 'Beggin' yer pardin,' he sez, 'yer hev'!' " Again the story teller inspected his limited audience.

"Did the young man get out of the cave, Robert?" asked Ann Mariah, with eager interest, and a delighted and simple look upon her sweet face.

"That 'air, Ann," said Bob, striking a particularly large horsefly off the roan's back with a skilful flick of his whip, "is w'at I am arter a-gettin' at. So, ag'in, I may say. in the langwidge of the historiun," continued Likkum, and Ann Mariah gave a long, low sigh of happy content, "the young man, he picked bar'ls uv purls frum trees, and likewise dimun's, and jools," Likkum hesitated not, in his critical approach to a climax, to explain any lack of special difference between "purls and dimun's" and "jools," but hastened on; "and he got out of the cave," this incidental, rather blunt and, as it were, auxiliary climax was considerably reached for the relief of Ann's feelings engrossed with the possible liberation of the magician's imprisoned victim. "And," went on Bob, hopelessly mixing up the magician and the politician, "the politician, he found a castle the doop, he built, weth the a-'sistance uv ther magic lamp, an' the politician, he tuk that; and the politician, he found a red hot stove, w'at the doop hed heated fur to cook his dinner, and he tuk that, and he found a wife the doop hed got, an' he tried to take that," and Ann's lover was, for the last time, interrupted by Ann's breathless inquiry,

"Robert, did he take that?"

"No," said Bob, after a moment's deliberation, "he drawed the line there,—not but w'at the wife'd a-gone,

too," said Bob ruminatively, "ef that 'air politishun'd a-hed his way."

"And," said Ann Mariah after the narrator had evidenced, by an unusually prolonged silence, that the final climax of the thrilling story might have transpired, "is that all?"

"That," said Bob, much, in the way of silence, argument, accustomed and well informed viewing of farm landscape, having fallen out since leaving Ann's abode,—"that," repeated Likkum, catching a glimpse of the first appearance, in the distant vista, of the church spire, at the town of T——, "be, ez near," said he carefully, "ez I kin reck'lect, a-bout all,—although," reflectively, after a pause, "I b'lieve they finully throwed that 'ere politishun inter ther river."

After a brief and eloquent silence, in which Ann and Robert lapsed into the depths of wordless and expressive "sparkin'," Bob Likkum spoke up.

"An' thet 'air reminds me," said William White's political friend and backer, "thet 'air politishun: he'd *orter* to be throwed inter ther river; an' so'd *orter* Jason Jump an' Ben Grigscomb. I must git 'em, our party, a-organized fur Billy White's nomination fur congress."

Bob drove down the main street of T—— in a satisfied frame of mind, for Ann and he had succeeded in spending, upon their drive of five miles, a most pleasant and agreeable time of wisdom, jest and other — especially the other — social intercourse.

As Likkum's roan drew the democrat up to the door of the Traver's Hotel, Uncle Peter Braddock, Benjamin Grigscomb and Bradford Simons, together with William White, were seen standing beneath the trees in front of the town tavern.

Uncle Peter was animated and talkative; Grigscomb

was listening with deep apparent attention, and White and Simons, seemingly oblivious of all but entirely friendly relations, were quietly interchanging words of speech upon the subject of John's approaching trial.

It is doubtful whether William White was ever thoroughly satisfied as to Brad Simons' part in that night attack. Smoky Billings, however, following a hint conveyed by Bob Likkum's recognition of the perfidious and murderous messenger Bill, as one of Brad Simons' drovers, permitted himself, in subsequent speculations upon the responsibility for the assault, to dwell, at considerable length, upon the possible share Brad might be supposed to have taken in White's waylaying.

Still, with the disappearance of Bill from the country, and the care with which Simons had covered up his own tracks, the inspiration of the attack was never positively fixed. One good, however, resulting from Smoky's suspicions, was to increase if possible the vigilance of White's employe; so that Simons, at this time, scarcely moved or breathed without Billings, in some way, keeping himself informed of those actions, on the part of the cattle raiser.

As Bob Likkum drove up, Simons was saying to White, with a secret and malicious satisfaction it was difficult to conceal:

"You remember, White, that witness to John's *alibi*—the one I spoke to Grigscomb about, that day,—ahem!—that day, you and I had our little misunderstanding?"

White said he remembered perfectly well.

"I've got the witness sure as you're born," said Brad, with the sly insinuation of one otherwise considering something which he felt certain would not be pleasant to his companion.

William White was either unconscious of the other's

manner, or determined to give no occasion for a renewal of hostilities between Simons and himself, for he answered that he was heartily glad to hear Simons say so. He showed the liveliest interest in Brad's information, and turned to the cattleman with evidence of relief and satisfaction in his face and in his voice.

"You must know, Brad," exclaimed the literary man, "that this that you have told us is all we have been waiting for. If what you say is true, and, of course, I do not doubt it, you have rescued John from a most unpleasant if not a most dangerous situation. Who is the witness?" asked White naturally enough.

But this, Simons declined to say, asserting his intention of privately communicating such knowledge alone to Lawyer Grigscomb. The wily and unscrupulous cattleman was bent, if possible, upon retaining exclusive control of the various stages of proceedings which involved the final mastery not only of John Brad-dock's case but that of De Braddock, his sister, as well. Brad, as will soon be seen, already occupied, in the mind of the trusting and confiding country girl, the place of inspirer of the means of saving and savior of her imperiled brother, and Brad Simons did not intend, by any false or ill advised step, to allow himself to risk the loss of the continued occupancy of that place of vantage.

"What's that!" exclaimed Benjamin Grigscomb, turning quickly to Brad; "have you found that witness you were telling me about?"

Brad said he had.

"You should have reported to me, at once," said the lawyer somewhat impatiently.

Simons mumbled some excuse or other.

"See, here," said Uncle Peter to Simons, "Bradford, why ain't ye speak to me, 'bout sich a important thing?"

"Just waiting my chance, while you discussed Hiram's illness with Grigscomb," responded Brad cheerily.

"What do you think," asked Uncle Peter addressing himself to Benjamin Grigscomb,—“I say, Grigscomb,” and Uncle Peter's voice took on a shade of anxiety, “what do ye think uv it?”

"What—of Mr. Simons' communications?" replied the attorney,—“of the very greatest importance.”

"Be they?" said Uncle Peter wistfully.

"How's Hiram, Peter?" called Bob from his seat in the democrat, with Ann still by his side, and arriving at this moment.

"Got a fightin' chanst, Bob," said old Braddock thankfully and happily.

The Kentucky man had unexpectedly surprised those about him, taken a turn for the better and was still alive.

"Glad to hear it," rejoined the sincere inquirer cordially; and Bob Likkum and Ann Mariah passed on.

"Gentlemen—gentlemen, the hangin' 's over; go home—go home—go home," chanted a voice, its uncanny owner coming swiftly from behind the corner of the inn, "go home—go home—go home,—'thout," lamented the speaker, "ye hain't no home. Did some-un'," asked the flighty newcomer stopping in front of Uncle Peter, "break up your home? Mine broke—my heart broke—long ago! You—all of you," cried Rachel Bolers wildly, "go home, if you have homes. Do you," continued the poor creature, moving to Simons with an appearance of disordered recollection of Brad, "mend hearts, or break them?"

"There, there, my poor creature,—there," enjoined Simons, with a pretense of soothing in his tones, "go along—go along."

"They didn't hang the right man, did they?" que-

ried the distracted female, coming closer to Simons, and peering more intently into the face of the observant man. "Did they—did they hang the right man?" she repeated with almost sane insistence. "Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the questioner; "we know—we know what's at the root of all troubles an' trials and trib'lations, don't we?" and the mowing figure stood and nodded mysteriously at Brad Simons, and gibbered in his face. "The sight that sees sometimes don't tell, the heart that feels rings its own knell!" intoned the crazy being weirdly. "Say," cried the woman, in a further burst of disordered passion, "I saw a bird thet carried home a seed to its nest, and the worm turned and stung it."

"Do move on, Rachel," urged Brad, who showed, during this scene, a return to the nervousness which the cattle raiser had manifested on the occasion of the visitation of the woman in Farmer Braddock's yard, on the day of the eclipse; "we are busy," said he, fretfully; "now, move on!"

"Yes, yes," retorted the woman; "too busy for justice. I know, I know. They say I'm mad,—well, well, well; and, some day I'll not be mad, and then they'll—but I'll go and find who did it, and when I do," the woman looked about her vacantly, and suddenly seemed to realize the import of her first remarks, which had led her to pause, in the beginning, and address these assembled figures—

"Gentlemen," cried the woman wildly, "the hangin' 's over,—go home—go home—go home," and flitting away from the group at the tavern, and on up the street until out of sight, a wail, "go-o-o ho-o-ome," at last came faintly borne, in the distance, to their ears.

"That person," said Brad Simons, breaking the silence, "gives me the shivers."

"Now, gentlemen," observed Lawyer Grigscomb,

pleasantly, and with the aplomb of a studied politician, "I shall not direct you, in the dramatic and eerie fashion of our late visitor, to 'go home,' but you will all adjourn with me to my office, and talk over this new evidence of Mr. Simons which, I dare say, will afford us even greater scope, in detail."

While the party moved over the way to Grigscomb's retired and unobtrusive law office, Bob Likkum came out of the tavern where, with the matronly wife of the keeper of the hotel, he had just seen Ann Mariah, for the time being, comfortably installed.

For a moment, Bob hesitated; and then, walking briskly, overtook Uncle Peter.

Likkum drew Peter Braddock aside.

"Uncle Peter," remarked Bob Likkum, "you an' John both is hev'in' all yer kin do tuh meet expenses, reckon?"

"Givin' us a right smart rassle, Bob," said the old man, with something like a quiver in his voice.

"Peter," said the true hearted countryman, "ye know I've got a leetle laid up fur a rainy day—"

"Robert, no,—I couldn't think uv a-layin' this here onto you,—no, an', besides," said Uncle Peter, "maybe we, John an' me, kin pull thro'."

"Ye know where ter find me," said Bob, to which the stout-hearted old Indiana farmer nodded his head, in token of a grateful appreciation, and quickly and eagerly followed John's lawyer and the others into Benjamin Grigscomb's place of business.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DE HAS FRIENDS AT WORK.

Smoky Billings was looking after White's horse, in Mrs. Walmsey's stable. His seaman's high and bowling spirits had reached a climax expressed in the vocal rendering of a lively and animated song setting forth the virtues of a sailor's wife, who watched in storm and fair weather for the coming of "Jack at sea." Smoky was at the height of his melodious achievement, when Mrs. Walmsey's voice, accompanied by a sight of the widow's plump figure at the door of her house, broke in upon his musical accomplishment with,

"Mr. Saunders is at the gate—maybe, you could help him 'light."

Job Saunders had ridden over that morning to put his fate with the widow to the test. He had been obliged to don, in lieu of better, the big, white, bell crown beaver; and he sat his horse, in presence of Smoky and the lady of the house, with a solemn and judicial air. He was cordially invited by Billings and the widow, the last of whom had come for that purpose to the front door, to dismount and enter the hospitable portals standing wide for his reception.

Just then, William White, in his rooms on the second floor of Mrs. Walmsey's dwelling, put his head out of the window, and seized the opportunity to gather news from down the road and in the vicinity of town, from which general locality Job, White's intended source of information, had but recently ridden.

"Job," called White, "any news?"

"Billy," said the widow's swain with due gravity, "that 'ere relation uv Peter Braddock's be still a-holdin' his own."

"That's good," rejoined White. "How's John Braddock?"

"Hear he be p'utty fair, but Tom Bolers 's a-gittin' sick," said Saunders.

"Good and bad. Won't you come in?" asked White.

And, thereupon, with Mrs. Walmsey still prominent in his fancy, it transpired in the confession of Job, "that he didn't keer ef he did."

"By Jacks!" said Bob Likkum, a short time after Ann's brother had dismounted, "it be a-goin' ter rain cats, dogs and pitchforks," and the Likkum roan and democrat drew up at the Widow Walmsey's door, seemingly, as fate would have it, at a seasonable though unexpected time to put into execution Bob's protest to Job's and "the widder's" contemplated folly.

Robert Likkum was no marplot, and it did not rest in his previous knowledge that Job was taking this day to force conclusions with the widow; but Bob had political business with White, and entered the widow's parlor unannounced. It must be remembered that Bob Likkum was a longtime friend and confidential associate of the Saunders family and, as has before been seen, fearless if of a nature intrusive in the adjustment of other people's affairs, where those affairs affected the personal feelings of the Likkum heart or better nature. He proceeded, at first in silence, to view with grave disapproval the sight of Job, with his arm unmistakably around the widow's enticing and seductive waist.

"Is Mr. White to hum'?" asked Likkum in formal and austere tones.

Bob had a pathetic picture very clearly outlined in

his imagination of a sweet, brave, patient woman looking up at him, and, with tears filling her true eyes, saying, "Oh! Robert, I have to support us both," and Bob, really, was in a pitiable state of doubt and uncertainty as to what to do.

As Likkum entered the widow's parlor, the arm of Joe Saunders,—whose overgrown, white, bell crown beaver, from a neighboring table, viewed with severe and formal looks the events transpiring before it,—slowly and clandestinely withdrew from the widow's form. Job in an earnest and sincere effort to recover his composure, much heated by extended amatory proceedings antedating Bob's arrival, cleared his throat; while the widow and the bell crown hat vied with each other in the assumption of looks of serious and weighty concern.

"Is Mr. White to hum'?" once more propounded Robert.

"I think, Robert," said Mrs. Walmsey, after a moment's hesitation, "that you will find William in his room."

With a keen while sorrowful gaze, Likkum eyed the two lost beings sitting on the sofa, and ascended to White's apartments.

Robert Likkum, William White's acknowledged congressional manager, was in trouble. The convention, which was expected to nominate their party candidate for the congressional race, would soon convene. Likkum had encountered a determined and unlooked for obstacle to White's success, and had hastened to White to consult him.

"Billy," said Bob as, in the latter's room, he came upon White seated comfortably behind a cob pipe, "Brad Simons hez that young feller, Claw-Hammer,—that ain't his right name, but you know who I mean—wears that darn swaller tailed coat, ye know, evenin'

meetin's, all the time—that's the feller,—well, Brad's got him in trainin' fer to beat ye fer yer own party's nomynation. Did ye ever hear the like—huh?" Bob Likkum's manner showed signs of a divided interest—his attention was certainly shared with William White, in a high degree; but his wandering thoughts were, likewise, down stairs, visiting with Job Saunders and the widow.

"Why, Likkum," in surprise, ejaculated the candidate, recognizing Bob's graphic and satisfactory description of a possible contestant for the choice of the convention, and removing the pipe from his mouth, "that man is one of our own party. How can Brad Simons do anything with him, I'd like to know! What do you mean, anyway?"

"Well, ye see, Claw-Hammer," and Bob thought this name good enough to stand,—“he's 'lowed that there cuss-ed crittur Simons to horn-swoggle 'im, some way, into goin' in ag'in' you, an' I thought ye mout keer ter know about it, that's all.”

“You're sure?”

“Sart'in.”

“Much obliged, of course, you know, for the information, but—”

“I don't know, now, Billy; need'nt make any mistake. *Might* giv' trouble,—Brad might; ye can't tell, nohow. He's slick, an' he's got lots o' money, an ain't a-go'n' to spare none uv it, so I hears he says, in a-de-featin' of you, at all p'int. Better let me look into this 'ere matter fer you, soon 's I kin git uh good chanst.”

“Of course, of course, Likkum,—you must do as you think best,” returned William White, readily, and, at once, yielding in what might have, otherwise, proved a grave and most serious political difference.

"See Job 's down steers," observed Bob Likkum, casually and impersonally.

"Yes?" was White's commonplace reply.

"Got a little business with him," explained the other, thoughtfully stroking his chin, and with a peculiar glint in the eye. "Excuse me, will you, please?"

"Certainly, Bob," replied the literary man.

"I'll 'tend to Brad Simons," Bob Likkum called back, as he started away bent on early judgment to Job Saunders and Widow Walmsey, in their unconscious and happy love making.

"So do, Likkum," answered White agreeably and seriously.

Ann Mariah's hurrying sweetheart was coming down the stairs when the following words, unmistakably adapted, by Job, from the marriage service of the Protestant Episcopal faith, met the ears of Likkum:

"Ef," Job was saying with unstudied eloquence, as in some spirit of demonstration of all right to and property in the widow, "they be any crittur," Mrs. Walmsey's admirer added strengthening words of his own, "w'at kin show cause why we two should not be wedded—"

When Robert Likkum resolutely broke in upon the astounded couple.

"At this p'int," asserted Bob, with quiet and becoming dignity, "they is one who not only kin show cause, but kin prove that ye're both erbout to commit crime, murder, an' make everlastin' ijuts uv yerselves! W'at," inquired Ann Mariah's partisan, with polite sarcasm, and viewing Saunders with undisguised contempt, while Ann Mariah's pleading and appealing face rested in fancy before his eyes, "may a mere stranger, w'at, of course, has never seen either uv ye two sens'ble people afore, ask, are ye a-goin' ter eat?"

"Why—why,—" blustered the lazy, shiftless, idle creature, at the widow's side,

"Yes, I know," drily articulated Likkum in tones of biting irony, "ye're a-goin' ter eat 'whys.' Them's good things ter eat. Ye're a-goin'," pursued Bob addressing Job remorselessly, and feeling vindicated in his own moving recollection of Ann,—“ye're a-goin' to soothe that bu'sted heart o' yourn weth ideel bliss, 'thout w'ich you an' ther widder, beggin' her pardin fur her not a-knowin' no better, is a-goin' ter die uv blighted lives. Ye must hev' the spurrin's an' the promptin's of thet deelishus time uv youth,” (the widow and Job were no longer young), “a-satisfied, w'en the feelin's—I may say,” added Job's relentless mentor coldly, “the tender feelin's uv the young must plunge and revel in the clear lake uv love. Arter w'ich ye're goin' ter sponge er starve.”

Any other of independence equal to Job's worthlessness would have rebelled. Indolent, no account, Job, likewise, knew his man and accepted, thus far, the fiat but, nevertheless, feebly essayed his own defense.

“My father——” spluttered the routed lover.

Robert Likkum, with difficulty, refrained from losing his bodily unrightness under this last wild, desperate and hopeless revival of the Saunders' family tradition concerning the anticipated return of the senior Croesus of the Saunders house. After a brief and fitting struggle, however, he succeeded in stifling an almost uncontrollable outburst of the most intense and sardonic merriment.

“Yer father's a-comin' home weth yer great expectations, eh?” after which remark, delivered in the briefest and most withering satire, Bob Likkum concluded.

“I say,” wound up Bob, really irresponsible with his own heart torn by thoughts of Ann's life unrequited

through this booby, on the sofa, by the side of Widow Walmsey, and addressing Job and very calmly inserting the last thrust of the knife under the fifth rib of the paralyzed Saunders, "ask yer sister Ann Mariah's forgiveness, an' go drown yerself in the Wabash. It's go'n' to be a freshet 'nuff, weth the rains a-comin', ter kiver even a ass as big as yer air," and Mr. Likkum turned him from that palsied double presence and went away, having done good work.

It will not be long, now, when the sentimental and unhappy suitor for the affections of the buxom widow will receive his modest dismissal and, it is to be hoped, a kinder fate at the hands of the present grateful and appreciative author, whose task, at last, will have been completed. Until that time, it is only desirable to say that Job Saunders rose from the side of the object of his untimely passion and, in becoming silence and the bell crown beaver, passed out of the fair widow's temporarily embarrassing presence. Love, it might be said, appeared to coldly avert his face, as if the tender and poetic little god and Mr. Job Saunders "never spoke, as they passed by." Job departed for his home, and, there, incomprehensible as it may seem, flew immediately and madly at the work of the small farm plot. His sister Ann Mariah, in great distress, thought her indolent and shiftless brother had become suddenly and dangerously ill; and viewed, with anxiously increasing alarm, his volcanic actions before she was finally convinced of their entire and *bona fide* sanity. After this, Job Saunders, in a continuous and unbroken record of persistent and effective industry, came to be regarded, by his simple and trusting kinswoman, in the light of one of the seven wonders of the world.

William White, left alone to his own thoughts, as a result of Robert Likkum's revelations concerning Brad

Simons' newly hatched political chicanery affecting the approaching convention, was far more disturbed and uneasy than he had wished Bob Likkum to know. Brad was getting up some shadows of his own. The dark and lowering reflection of the cattleman was beginning, in many ways, finally and threateningly to loom up against the vital face of the future, in the varied affairs of White's community interest, with a far deeper and more significant meaning than the writer-politician cared to confess to himself, much less to his anxious and faithful friend and congressional manager, Robert Likkum. Brad's present and latest manifestation of knavery, representing the firebrand of concealed, treacherous and desperate political cabal, therefore, was intensified, in its present unobscured and deadly glare upon the unexplored and unknown waters of the writer's troubled way ahead, by the ominous shape of the stealthy, silent cattle dealer steadily developing, at this period, in power and menace, day by day.

"Mr. White," said Smoky Billings, entering White's room and smoothing his own face convulsed in recollection of Bob's assault on Job, which he had just overheard, "I've been a-prospectin' some, as the feller says, an' I b'lieve that you'd be interested, sir, to hear what I've learned, out there," which final words Smoky indicated, by a wave of his strong arm, to mean a general direction that might lead to the farm of Brad Simons.

White, still seated ruminatively in his apartment, sedately put aside his own meditations and addressed himself gravely to Billings.

"Have you been over yonder?" questioned the writer, in the atmosphere of tacit understanding existing between the two upon the subject of Brad Simons' affairs, and turning slowly in his chair until he faced the lastcomer.

"Yes, sir—that's it—I've been a-cruisin' over there," said Smoky going to the door and seeing that it was carefully closed, and then returning; "and I think I've took a reef in his sails."

"Yes," said White, quietly,—“what is it?”

"Well, sir,—as I tol' you, already,—I got acquainted with this 'ere Rachel Bolers, 'at wanders around the country, and got her frien'ship along o' me knowin' of feelin's she has ag'in' Brad Simons. I sees her fu'st, as I tells you, w'en I wuz with them there robbers."

Smoky had "smoked out," as the old country saying has it,—which pardonably translated means found out,—very little, as yet; or sufficient, in any sense, to warrant him, before this, in coming to his chief with information. It is, therefore, but fair to presume that the rather skirmishing experience, which he now related for the first time to his employer, was in the nature alone of a reconnoissance. It was probably based upon the detective instincts of Smoky Billings sharpened by his interview with Rachel Bolers in the haunted wood, when she had urged him to see Mona Walker, Brad Simons' housekeeper. The cunning of Simons, or the difficulty experienced by Rachel in adjusting herself to a more definite course of action in her prompting of Billings, had thoroughly tested the powers of opportunity and patience possessed by the sailor. He engaged White, at this point, both with a sense of the delicacy of the situation and its equal seriousness.

"Smoky," said White, "did you get into that cave, before you left those fellows, that time you were with the outlaws?"

"No, sir," replied White's follower. "Ye see, I lit out from 'em, afore they kum to the cave, w'en I seen w'at they wuz doin', that night, to you,—though me not knowin' you, then, and me a-hopin' to find some help,

w'ich I failed fur to do; an' I've tried, times, since to find the secret entrance; but, whiles I think I know 'bout where 't is, I can't quite fetch it, somehow.

"At the time I was deceived into goin' in with them there gang uv desperadoes," continued Billings, "I learned, yo' see, somethin' 'bout their biz'ness, and found out somep'n' in the affairs of Rachel—Rachel Bolers. Now, sir, to return, as th' feller sez, to Mr. Simons: Mrs. Bolers put me onto that 'ere gen'lman's housekeeper; an'," went on the speaker, closing his eye with the retrospective air of a connoisseur,—“an' she may be said, sir, to be a pretty un'—a prettier un' and a tidier craft,” added Smoky, yielding, in a generous burst of extra commendation, to a nautical illustration, “I have hardly ever laid these here two bullseyes onto. That hair o' hern is like the glory uv th' settin' sun—all gold and burnin'! Well, you see, sir,” said the susceptible sailor, recovering from his fervent rhapsody, “I was just passin' in that neighborhood, an' the feelings of sociableness is so strong betwixt the gen'leman an' me, that I thought I'd just stop by and look in, a moment. It was rather late,” went on Smoky Billings, “and I calculated on the want of ettikette in droppin' in on a mate fur a social call, at eleven o'clock in the evenin', even if that mate does love anybuddy as much as he loves me,” Smoky grinned. “So I just kind o' hitched my horse in the woods, and went around by the barn where, on pri-or and pree-vious occasions, I have, as the poet writer says, ‘disported myself upon the haymow,’ overhearing of him and her talk. While standin’,” Smoky continued to relate to the deeply interested White, “at the barn—it was dark—the moon not yet risin' (rising)—I seen him step to a winder in the settin' room, downstairs, in the full light of the lamp, the winder curtain up. He turned back into the room, an'

a female figur', the housekeeper, come into the light, and turned an' went back. I thought they seemed anxious and a-conversin', this way,—a-movin' about the room, keepin' time to their feelin's like,—so, I went over, an' stood under the winder. There was a hole in a winder pane," said Smoky Billings scratching his head, as he recalled his society manners, "and I heard him sayin': 'Keep out of my way, Mona,' and I heard Mona say, 'No, I won't.' An', ye sec, Mona wuz the housekeeper, who I know'd on'y by sight. 'Then,' says he, 'I'll fix you.' 'Oh, will you?' says Mona, sarcastic. 'Yes,' he says. 'When will you do it?' says Mona,—'when you marry *me*?—you've talked long 'nuff 'bout makin' me yer wife to be doin' it, and now you've got to keep yer word.' 'Oh!' says he. 'Yes, "oh!",' says Mona, quick as lightning. 'I've got yer promise.' 'Well,' says he, 'you can't prove it. Our agreement was took, when the bank was robbed.' 'You're a fiend,' says Mona. 'Thank you,' says he."

When Smoky Billings had arrived at the above point in the narrative of what he had been the witness and auditor of as transpiring between Brad Simons and his housekeeper, Mona Walker, White turned thoughtfully to the window.

That which Smoky had just related, so far, tallied with gossip; and, while it might undeniably point, to say the least of it, to questionable doings of Brad Simons, it had, that White could perceive, no determinate bearing upon any unfair or underhand scheme in the presecution of De, which, through Billings' investigations, and the divinations and suspicions of the literary man,—and love is wonderfully wise, at times,—the latter had become finally convinced Brad Simons was conducting.

Billings had been silently eying his friend and bene-

factor; and, now, as if divining what was passing in White's mind, he broke the silence, saying:

"That ain't all, cap'n."

The writer turned to the speaker.

"What more?" he asked.

"There's some mystery, some'eres, Mr. White," said Billings; "and that woman, Rachel Bolers, is somehow a-sailin' aroun' in it."

"Do you know, Smoky," rejoined White, "I've thought, more than once, that Rachel Bolers put that paper in Uncle Peter's harness room! I don't know why I've thought so, but I have."

"She *putt* it jes' thare," gravely returned Smoky, solemnly wagging his head, covered with its shock of coarse, dark hair, at William White.

"She put it there, then, did she!" exclaimed the writer, who had been previously informed, by Billings, of the discovery of the heretofore unexplained scrap of writing, and who was pleased at this sudden and unlooked for confirmation of his own surmise.

"She put it thare," assented William White's companion. "She put it thare, she tole me, sure 'nuff, as a warnin', in her own way, to ye all. An' I tells ye, it's a queer cuss of a world, an' ye got to keep yer toplights open; an' them there seemin' crazy people does queer things, an' gits suddenly sane 's you er me; an' there's method, sometimes, too, anyway, in the'r madness," said Smoky, "as is like thet play what Shakespeare writ, called Hamlet, and as is peculiar, see?"

While Smoky's comments upon the mentally unsound and the poet's great play were sincere, White said nothing.

"Rachael Bolers was a-layin' around Simons' premises, that night, I pay him this 'ere sociable call, I tells you about," added Billings, in a tone which implied he

threw in this piece of extra information for what it was worth.

"Why, Smoky, you know she is known to wander, at will, all over the country," replied White.

"Yes," said Smoky, "but, that night, I tells you about, she was as sane as you er me."

This was a statement of fact of so distinctly surprising a character as to challenge even White's belief had he not long since conceived the theory that Rachel was playing a part. However, he met the assertion of seemingly so impossible an occurrence with an expression of astonished disbelief.

"But, I tell you," persisted Billings, "no doubt about it—I talked with her."

"With Rachel Bolers?" queried De's old lover.

Smoky stubbornly nodded his head.

"And what did she have to say?" asked the other appearing genuinely and completely nonplussed.

"She's got some grudge ag'in' that feller Simons," rejoined Billings gazing intently into his companion's eyes.

"Did you," eagerly questioned William White passing over, for a moment, the strange mental conditions governing Mrs. Bolers' sudden and unexpected recovery of her senses, in the deeper interest in what she might be capable of affording in the way of information to assist the speaker in his perplexities with regard to the scheming stock raiser,—“did you learn from her what Simons is up to, Smoky?”

"Not altogether," said Smoky, "but I mean to see his little old bluff and call it. She—"

"Rachel—?" inquiringly interrupted the other's employer.

"Rachel Bolers," acquiesced Smoky Billings quietly, "is a-goin' to git at them robber devils fur me, an' fur

Mona, Brad Simons' p'utty housekeeper, ef she kin, an' git that 'air marriage agreement w'at, it's p'utty sart'in sure, they stole—at them outlaws stole frum the bank. Mona wants it, an' so do I."

"That will do Mona good, no doubt; but how will it help us, Smoky?" patiently asked William White.

"Well, Mr. White," candidly replied the man, "outside uv giner'ly blowin' Simons' ol' hulk out uv the water, and jist nach'ly showin' uv 'im up fur a scoun'rel in his relashuns weth Miss Mona, I ain't sure; but I got a kind uv a presentymunt that it'll take a reef in 'is sails, 'at he'll hev' trubble a-gittin' out uv 'em, w'en 'e wants, ag'in, ter bowl afore the win', in any new er present course uv evil ways." With this exhaustive and satisfactory analysis of his position in the matter of Brad's threatening and dubious craft, and with a peculiarly impressive shake of the head, Smoky took a mariner's unmeasured "chaw of tobacker," and ruminated in the face of his beloved benefactor.

"I hope you may be right, Smoky, my man," said White simply. "They're a daring lot,"—the literary man unconsciously included Simons with the other outlaws,—"and we're going to have all we want to do to circumvent them."

And Smoky agreed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ONE OF "THEM LITERARY FELLERS" THREATENS TO
ACHIEVE RENOWN.—A RESCUE IS EFFECTED FROM
THE RAGING WATERS OF THE FLOOD.

One evening, when "thro' the sycamores the candle lights were gleaming," William White, who had sworn to a friendship for De in whatever troubles, known or unknown, that might hedge her about, went over to Peter Braddock's farmhouse. He found the family of Farmer Braddock unusually cheerful and, when he walked in upon Mrs. Braddock and Uncle Peter and De, White could not but feel a kind of reflection of their evident high spirits. Even if De did not seem wholly happy, her face, when the subject of the approaching trial of her brother was broached, wore a look of confident anticipation, which expressed something of decision and content. Brad Simons had been effective in his efforts and assurances in the matter of John's prospective acquittal. Mother Braddock was in excellent spirits, and the fat farmboy Esau, on whom some additional and unaccountable exhilaration appeared to have descended, joined the air of Mother Braddock's joy with appropriate selections of song, joke and retort. The banjo, noted once before as one of De's souvenirs of happier days with William, was brought forth, and the strangely exalted Esau proved himself eminently successful upon the rollicking instrument and rendered some choice selections of Wabash melodies. De, likewise, was, once more, prevailed upon to fill the little parlor with the musical trance of her own rich young voice.

At length came White's turn and, in response to an universal call upon the efforts of that literary artist, the poet-author recited the following original verse:

"LOST RIVER."

To those who have closely followed the text of the narrative, or to those having other satisfactory means of information, it may not be necessary to say that Lost River, an actual stream in southern Indiana, the scene of our present story, has no known source, and, in the course of its wanderings on the earth, will disappear suddenly and unaccountably, and afterward reappear in a manner quite as mysterious and unexplainable as that surrounding its birth; these wayward actions of its picturesque and erratic life occurring with a baffling, curious though interesting frequency.—Auth.

"Lost river ! seek your lonely way,
Through field and forest, hills and plain:
Striving forever thus to shrink
From sight and toil, in vain.

"Our course is run, our journey sped,
In present sorrows—passing joys;
We may not flee the call of one,
Nor still the other's voice.

"Fair, wand'ring stream, whence is your flow,
That softly leaves our fuller sight;
But fills with faith our eager souls,
In fancy's magic flight;

"For, as with you, we disappear,
And, yet, unseen may not remain;
So they, that pass from shore to shore,
Shall sink to rise, again.

"Whence come your deep, mute mystery;
Your quiet, cool, alluring thrall;
That sense of rest and still repose
Sent at our voiceless call ?

"Your chanting waters, murm'ring groves
Are full of haunting shapes, and fraught
With gentle mem'ries, dear delights
That happiness has wrought:

"Once more, your banks with spring are green,
And soft beneath my resting form;
While love, from out yon beck'ning glade,
Comes smiling in her charm.—

"As does the weary traveler, here,
 Who has the blessed right to lose
 The boist'rous world that roars afar,
 And, by your marge, to muse,

"So, silent river, steal away,
 And leave the brawling day behind,
 To find a hidden hour of rest,
 In parts remote and kind."

The modest effort was gracefully applauded by the simple gathering; and Esau, much to Mr. Braddock's impatient displeasure, stated roundly that,

"Them there sentyments wuz, ez it struck him, purty nigh the nayborhood uv erbout the ke'rect thing."

Uncle Peter, upon whom the effect of the poem had been singularly and noticeably impressive,—and with a sense of deep and unexpected gratification in the success of the poet upon a theme of pleasing and especial interest to the old man,—felt, in a prompting of jealous monopoly of appreciation not uncommon, impelled to turn his customary and, in this instance, unjustifiable nagging upon the joyous Esau.

"Whut," in a somewhat petulant fashion, said the Indiana farmer to the seemingly irrepressible boy, "do *ye* know about it?"

"I wuzn't a-doin' nothin'," said the unlucky Esau, who took from no other what, after all, he was not especially unhappy in taking from Uncle Peter.

"Then don't," sententiously, observed the Wabash tiller of the soil. "Them there verses o' yourn, William," remarked the same rustic critic, here turning his attention to White, "is fine." Uncle Peter, upon being lately reminded that public men, statesmen and politicians wrote books, and various other things too numerous to mention, had, as he thought, at last mastered the purposes of literature, and proceeded. "That there

po'me o' yourn, Willium," continued Uncle Peter, while he smoothed his captious visage, the result of his recent passage with Esau, into a look of determined and grave judgment, "orter send ye to congress, immejut."

With the humility characterizing the producer of a cause for such vast and incredible advancement, White hastened to disclaim merits so considerable and lofty, but Uncle Peter would not listen to his denials.

"No, sir, I mean jes' whut I sez," stoutly maintained the old gentleman. "Now, I want to tell ye," continued the farmer, "what they do say down to Jacobs' Store," mentioning the celebrated resort of the neighborhood for the dispensation of universal gossip, political and otherwise; "they do say to Jacobs' Store, 'at yer orter perk up a bit, an' go in fur the honors uv the people to Wash'ton, fur sure.'"

In happy ignorance of the obstacles that had sprung up in the way of William White's union with their daughter, the good elders of the Braddock household had about agreed upon the desirability of White as a possible future son in law.

De had kept her own counsel, meeting, for the sake of John, uncomplainingly that which had been thrust upon her, and going to her daily round of self denial and duty with as cheerful and unstudied a sense of fortitude, endurance and resignation as might be. Of course, it was the destruction of her own life's hopes, a union with this man Brad Simons, but the object, to her sense of understanding, was too great—too dear, in her simple and unaffected unselfishness and sincerity, for her to hesitate, a moment, in the course to pursue.

It was all settled in her own mind—some day, she might tell William all about it—the whys and the wherefores—it might even, sometime, be her duty to do so—but, now, her way was plain before her—silence and

wait. So neither the mother nor the father, any more than William White himself, was aware of the girl's act of Spartan and sublime heroism.

As, with seeming unconstraint and old time enjoyment to De and William, the evening wore on, the rain renewed an unusually heavy downpour that, with little intermission, had been continuing for several days.

"Th' bottoms," remarked the elder Braddock, referring to the lowlands lying along the river, "'ll be purty nigh drowned out, ef this keeps up."

As the torrent came down, and the wind arose and rattled and beat upon doors, and then whirled away with the rain to burst in great splashes against the barn, and the thunder broke in a deafening roar, and the lightning rent and gashed the night, White recalled the last he had seen of Smoky Billings.

That evening in the lull of the storm, just previously to William White leaving the house of Widow Walmsey, Smoky had come to him and said that he wanted to make "a social call." Smoky's friend very well knew what was meant by this speech, but admitted no comprehension which might have led even Billings himself or another to suppose it was understood that White's energetic and resolved man had a repetition of a visit to Simons' place in view.

It now occurred to the writer to wonder if Smoky had reached shelter from the fury of the tempest?

"I wouldn't care for any harm to come to him!" thought White to whom, as a matter of fact, the subject of his reflections was no more affectionately attached, than was the writer to Billings himself.

And where was Smoky?

As evening had come on apace, the heavy downpour of rain had suspended sufficiently for William White to walk, from his own boarding place at Mrs. Walmsey's

about a mile away, up to Uncle Peter's place. Accordingly, sufficient cessation in the storm had occurred to warrant Smoky Billings in sallying forth upon special business in hand; although it is very doubtful, after he had decided where lay the means to such important results as he had in mind, whether a sudden disposition on the part of the heavens themselves to fall in would have deterred him in his quest. Smoky, therefore, had set forth from Widow Walmsey's, and was last seen, that evening, by White, making progress down the road in the direction of Simons' farm a few miles distant.

White's henchman, riding his chief's horse, proceeded until he came within easy reach of Brad Simons' stables, when he dismounted and tied the animal in a neighboring clump of trees. This accomplished, he stole around to the barn which loomed an object of shadowy and vague proportions not far off in the night. It was now the rain came on, and found the scout, at about nine or ten o'clock, sheltering himself within the comfortable precincts of Simons' barn.

Smoky was serenely and meditatively listening to the wind and rain beating upon the objects without. The dark interior of the barn, wherein the man had taken up his temporary quarters, was occupied by no noises other than those of the outside storm, with its fitful peals of thunder attended by the blinding glare of lightning and then, in the comparative hush, the stamp of a horse's hoof; when there suddenly passed over the waiting Billings something as nearly allied to the first, faint, creeping tremors of fear as, with Smoky, was possible or even agreeable. An involuntary impulse caused the waiting man to sit up from a reclining attitude luxuriously enjoyed upon a pile of empty sacks. There was the "feel" of someone present, other than himself. He listened intently. He could hear nothing but the storm,

tho' his hearing seemed as sensible of that mysterious, silent "something," as any other part of him. He put out his hand, and instantly withdrew it—there *was* something there! Smoky Billings was no coward, but his flesh crawled with an indefinable chill, and the geese, in the neighboring barnyard, could not have displayed a finer crop of "goose flesh," than the worthy spy.

"Who's there?" asked Billings in a husky whisper.

There was no response.

"Wonder," flashed through his brain, "if he's dead," which remark referred to any unknown, and had no special application to Brad Simons; although it would, doubtless, have uncharitably filled various souls with satisfaction, and amongst them even Smoky's own, had such been the deceased identity of the subject of Billings' wondering surmise.

Dead or living, the cause of Smoky's anxious conjectures kept the latter in a state of painful uncertainty and suspense; until Smoky, at last brushing aside his unmanly scruples, struck one of his lucifers which, in sailor habit, he carried in a water tight case about him, and allowed its flare to illumine the scene.

"Well," muttered Billings, as the light of the match died away and expired, leaving a spark of fire in the charred wood, which suddenly, as if dipped in water, disappeared in the thick gloom, "I'll be blamed!" Smoky had recognized, by the quick flash of the match, the slumbering form and features of Rachel Bolers. "I might've know'd it."

Billings gave himself but a moment's reflection and, thrusting forth his arm a second time, gently roused the slumberer.

"Hu-s-h-h!" warned the man, bending quickly and closely over the awakened woman lest a surprised outcry of alarm might, even in the commotion of the elements,

be an imprudent result of this step; "belay, missis,—it's me—Smoky—Billings."

"Oh," the woman said, "it's you, is it?"

"Yes," repeated Smoky. "I furgot all about ye, fur a minute."

There was evidently an understanding which had brought them, at the same time, to Simons' farm that night.

"Can we git it, ye think?" asked Billings, in a muttered whisper.

"If Brad's away, like Mona said, we kin," replied the woman, in like tones of subdued utterance.

"Let's be at it, then," whispered Billings; and, despite the inclement and threatening nature of the elements raging without, these two singular partners in enterprise crept forth from the barn and to the house; and, while Billings stole to an adjacent window minus a pane of glass, the woman Rachel Bolers remained under partial shelter and protection of an outhouse close to Simons' dwelling.

In a few moments, Billings returned to Rachel Bolers' side.

"Simons 's away but the parson's there," said the man, in a guarded voice. "Can't do nothin', with him there, can we?"

At this instant, there was a lull in the storm, the wind subsided to a mere breath, and the rain, for a moment, ceased its torrents of descending water. The sky, scarcely distinguishable in its vast and murky pall of cloudland overhead, offered but a dim, boundless view to the vision cast above to scan or search the density of infinite space. Nearby, the roar of the swollen waters of the river was heard, as they whirled on their way in a sullen angry flood, yellow and turbid with the soil. In the still moments of the storm's lull, man and woman

standing beneath the shed were silent, as if with a species of breathless and intent speculation upon their next attempt, a condition similar to that of the suspended functions of the tempest, when, out upon the night, from the river, rang a wild cry of,

“Help!”

“Listen,” exclaimed Billings, his seafaring instincts alert, and laying his hand upon the arm of Rachel.

The cry was repeated—

“Help!” it rose and circled through the air about them.

Smoky darted from the woman’s side.

“I’ll get the parson,” he said, as he sprang away; “fix the other with Mona, when we’re gone,” and, the next moment, was at the door of Simons’ house, beating upon the door and calling loudly,

“In there! a man drowning in the river. Come out.”

There were sounds of hurrying footsteps within. Simons’ housekeeper Mona Walker, and Parson Woods, both with looks of alarm, came hastening to the door.

Billings dragged Woods rapidly away towards the river plunging by like horses running mad, and not far from Brad Simons’ very door, the cattleman’s house standing on an elevated piece of ground overlooking the raging flood. Smoky paused a moment at the barn, entered hastily, snatched up a lantern he knew to be there and lit it. He next turned, with indescribable swiftness, seized a coil of rope, ran out of the barn and rejoined Parson Woods.

“Come along,” Billings cried to Woods and leaping forward was followed by the willing minister.

“Mate,” called the onetime sailor, projecting his powerful voice beyond to the swollen river, “we’re coming,” and the next instant showed Smoky Billings, by

the light of the lantern swinging in his hand, the edge of the great waters creeping in at his feet. The resolute sailor perceived the faint dim outlines of a tree standing firm and true in the struggling torrent, at a critical distance beyond in the risen tide of the river racing past, and, in the tree's swaying branches lashing the wild current, clung a man for dear life.

"Here, parson," cried Billings, and he ran along the margin of the flood to a point further up the stream. When he had gained a position above the trees, and so that one, in the river, starting to swim out to the rescue, would just reach the swirling branches, when swept down stream by the rush of current, he stopped. Smoky's old seafaring life and training rose strong within him. The rope, ample in length, had, by rapid and skilful manipulations of the nimble fingers of Parson Woods' companion, already been attached firmly to Smoky Billings' waist; and when the latter finally turned to the minister, and, holding out an end of the rope, said simply,

"Take a turn o' this here," the preacher knew what the nerry fellow meant.

"Use care, Billings, and God be with you," was all the parson said.

"Amen, parson!" and the man sprang into the flood sweeping by.

A moment later, two figures were drawn dripping, but otherwise safe, from the turbulent and swollen stream.

Parson Woods, in the light of the lantern held close to the face of the rescued unknown, fell back as one who had been smitten.

"Cy Saunders!" gasped the bewildered expounder of the gospel, groping blindly among his paralyzed faculties.

It was true.

The river, Smoky Billings and Parson Woods had mysteriously given back the senior Saunders to his long expectant family and, to say the least of it, much surprised friends.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE THRILLING AND SENSATIONAL RELIGIOUS SCRUPLES OF DE BRADDOCK.

De Braddock, in all the wide world of affairs, was not the only one to have to face, at one and the same time, the duty to the unseen and the duty to them on earth most beloved. By a word, she could save John. Could she say that word, when it was not true? The strain upon her now involved not only what natural promptings to the truth she may have possessed, but her religious scruples as well. What could she do! Now she sat in her own little room; in her obscure, modest little country home: The Average piecing out the sum of human existence. She looked at her small stock of books on their simple shelf of home make. Did they supply her with the sought for knowledge? The Bible stood out prominently from the rest. Did it suggest aught to relieve the aching breast of the tried and unhappy woman? "*Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth,*" it kept saying to her, "*the same shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth the same shall be loosed in heaven.*" In the days when these things came to pass, she thought, the joy of humanity and of the world was meant; and the saying was for the happiness of all creation. When there came to Jerusalem those that said they had seen the Son of Man, and they marveled that heard, lo! ye, came He, also, and, in the public places, raised up all hearts. There was rejoicing and great gladness, for had not He,

that was to *loose* all evil, pain and suffering, come among them. With a word she could create great joy. The church refused to let her speak that word, although the church was empowered by Christ to both *bind* and *loose*.

In the small country town of T——, at this time, there stood a simple Catholic church. Hidden away in the solitude, silence and seeming sleepy inactivity of its shrubbery-embowered retirement, the unassuming structure bore surely anything but an air of obtrusiveness. A small paling fence surrounded the unostentatious place of worship, keeping it, as it were, from the approach of the idle and the irreverent. It boasted a diminutive and well kept lawn which, in summer, was faithfully watered each day, by its methodical priest; and was thriftily manured for the winter, when the fall browned the leaves. It was an attractive spot, as nature is attractive. A tree or two, with its other points of interest, lent the prospect an air of symmetry and repose, offering a glimpse of something refreshing in the midst of the other striving and struggling pessimism of the rural hamlet; for, be it understood, there exists in no place upon this mundane sphere any known spot where the dry, grasping passion of daily greed and strife comes not to plague and torture the inventor.

I believe in a Divine Law, in the ever-spirit, in all things, and in him whom Voltaire admitted lived, and was called Jesus Christ; I, likewise, believe in a far broader interpretation of the Word, than has yet been! —And I believe in Love and in Universal Redemption and Salvation.

The religion of Christ, as functioned by the Catholic—the Roman Catholic—faith, has drawn its stoutest defenders from Irish soil. The historic old church, perhaps, has, by them, been alone perpetuated to this day. The rector of the little country house of religious cere-

mony, described just before this, in truth was a mild mannered Irishman, gentle, to all appearances, and filled with mother wit. He had, by the years he had attentively and zealously presided over his parish, gained from his simple and unpretentious flock and community a degree of kindly, reverent and sympathetic regard. True to the legends of the mother church, he was yet known far and wide among the good people of the parish and vicinity as declining always to unnecessarily obtrude his clerical views, and was known as an unassuming gentleman who had been educated to his office, but who could be unfailingly a good fellow, an honest fellow and an entertaining one. Father Patrick O'Gorman's hair was streaked with gray, and his years, numbering a quarter of a century in his sacred calling, added to the age of twenty-five when he assumed holy orders, made him a half century in this world. His face was that of an ascetic,—long, thin, smoothly shaven, strongly featured. He was a tall man, in physical stature, and of goodly bulk. A priest, he was little if any acquainted with interests dominating aught save the affairs of the church. A reported miracle alone stirred his sublime enthusiasm; that is, if that miracle formulated new reasons for the faithful. He pronounced the musty jargon and data of an ancient time, with all the unction and confidence of one convinced of its perfect application to the existing conditions and needs of the present. Thus he suggested a slightly antiquated flavor; and might have been agreeably likened to a clerical Sir Roger de Coverly. He wanted us to think we had no right to think except to think to the point of accepting what he or the church thought. And here his amiability was strained to the utmost, for he said we would go to hell if we did not. There will exist a large number, below, if this be true; and it may afford a proper place

for the suggestive introduction of Robert G. Ingersoll's immortal view: "It were, of a surety, far happier and better to abide anywhere with your friends and those you love, than to strive unavailingly for paradise without them."

And it may not be wholly irrelevant to add, at such a point, that had we for two thousand years been permitted, by religious rule, to exercise the marvelous powers of the intellect as sedulously as we have been prohibited from thinking, we had known as much about the fact and fate of the soul as we now know little.

"But, father, think! if I keep silent—think!—my brother—what will become of him?" it was De Braddock expostulating with Father O'Gorman, in the little reception room of the rectory, in which the priest and his agonized and affrighted parishioner sat in earnest talk.

"My child," solemnly exhorted the holy father, "your evidence, though it might undeniably save your brother, would, nevertheless, be false under your sacred oath taken on the Holy Book. I grieve for your brother, but you must first think of your own soul."

"Think of myself, when those I love are in danger—in danger of life—in danger of—my God! cannot you understand?"

"The church, daughter,—it is the church that calls for your thought, before all else."

"And let my own blood go to—to," De shuddered, "maybe, to the—the—gallows," she whispered, in scarcely audible accents.

Brad Simons had not been idle, and had finally succeeded in filling the mind of the unsophisticated country girl with terrors dreamed and undreamed of; until, admitting the strictly legal gravity of John Braddock's real situation, his devoted and untiring sister had

wrought herself into a frenzy of apprehension and foreboding

Patrick O'Gorman replied to his suppliant's despairing protest and appeal:

"The church commands obedience. Eternal bliss awaits those of the faithful who do her bidding; eternal punishment those who do not."

"But he is innocent," persisted the young woman.

"That may be! it, at least, is natural for you to think so—to say so; but you must not violate your oath—you must tell the truth, in court or elsewhere."

"But I only secure justice—the law will execute an innocent man, if I do not testify as I say."

"Even admitting such to be so, what is human respect, to divine voice?" said the priest.

"But mercy! my brother is guiltless, and were he not, he is still my brother,—mercy!" cried the girl in an accession of despair.

"Be it so! mercy will be shown you," said the clerical coldly, "but not here,"—was the holy father right,—would mercy not be shown her there? "Hereafter, when, through your piety and holiness, you have found heaven, you may hope for mercy."

"When, through my own selfishness, I have seen loved ones destroyed; when, in order to purchase my own happiness, I have seen others go to perdition; when I have—such," broke off De, almost terrified at her own boldness, but still struggling on,—“such as I would be, then, make up heaven's gathering—those who, with the means of relief, turn from beings in distress! I—” the revolt of the ages trembled on the young creature's lips.

"You—you say this to me," exclaimed O'Gorman, in an effort to check what he, otherwise, foresaw to be

a revolution,—“me, the chosen minister of the Gospel of Christ!”

If she yielded, her brother was lost; if she ignored the restraint placed upon her by the strong ban of the church, she resisted its power in the teaching of her youth to consign her soul to endless punishment. De Braddock, for an instant, with her straining eyes, searched the dark ecclesiastical visage fronting hers, in a species of lingering and pained perplexity that she should, at last, find herself in final and hopeless issue with the stern, unrelenting, uncompromising, and, now, to her, unjust doctrine of lasting torment and the authority of its hoary institution. It was, however, but for a brief moment that she paused, surveying in its representative the face of that fabric which, for centuries of rise and fall, had subordinated, dominated and overawed the consciousness of the earth. As the heathen faith lashes and drives the conscience of the fanatic-crazed mother, so that she casts the tender babe of her bosom to the crocodile of the River Ganges to feed the gluttonous and insatiable maw of the watery monster, even so, in the arcana of the universe, was it with De. The glances of priest and parishioner seemed to flash like rapiers thrust in quick, darting encounter.

“I say it to you or to anyone,” with a strange and peaceful calm, replied De Braddock. “My brother John is innocent,—his trial will prove it,—and, if he were not, and I could save him by my testimony, whether false or true, I would do it. The law of happiness, while others pine and die, has no meaning for me. Punishment never did other than increase evil deeds. Love, alone, is perfection. My brother is loving and gentle. You know him. His love—his devotion have led him,” continued the woman and sister, with a power of eloquence that both characterized and distinguished her,

“to this pass. You are blind to *human* life; you dwell amidst the freezing, ghostly heights of divine, ambitious, churchly rule. Your sympathies and sense of human justice are cold and dead; your interests that of commanding ecclesiastical power. You forget that we no longer require the strong arm of dictation, but are dying and sorrowing for love — love without fear and without cruelty. You deny us these things. The thought of all time cries out against such heartlessness and injustice.” She ceased, was silent, her moment of inspiration gone by.

“My child!” exclaimed the representative of the church.

“Child! I am no child,” cried De Braddock.

O’Gorman’s manner experienced an instantaneous and striking change.

“Everlasting torment is Holy Mother Church’s decree for heresy and sacrilege,” he thundered.

De rose quietly, took a step and paused at the door.

“Justice,” is all she said, in low, even tones, and passed out of the presence of the priest.

CHAPTER XL.

TRIAL OF JOHN BRADDOCK.

The sudden return to sanity of Rachel Bolers, of course, excited some interest in the neighborhood where it was understood her loss of reason had been due to her daughter's early misfortune. However, in the popular mind, well attested cases of a return to rationality without previous indications of recovery, raised her above suspicion. If she had been partially sane,—if her own wildly picturesque conception that she was fate had, in apparent blindness, moved her seemingly to take advantage of the impunity with which the harmlessly irresponsible are sometimes permitted to go about, the present assured restoration of all her normal powers was no longer complicated, on her part, with even the semblance of any irrational method, or purposed cunning of deception in the community. Prior to the restoration of her faculties, Nance's mother was supposed to occupy a small cottage, in the country adjacent to T——. Here, with occasional visits to a charitable and kindly neighbor woman, she had been thought to live after her reason was broken by the shock following her daughter's misfortune and distressing earlier experience. Nance had always provided for her comfort, while unaware of her unfortunate parent's unhappy and questionable associations.

As Job Saunders had before informed William White, at the Widow Walmsey's, Tom Bolers was seriously ill, in jail, pending his own arraignment, which

was to follow that of his brother in law, for the murder of Zeke Smithin. There was little hope entertained for his recovery; and it looked as if Nance's brother might go to the great beyond with such secrets as he possessed irrecoverably locked in his mortal breast. Braddock's defense had about abandoned hope of further evidence, in this direction, favorable to their client. Every effort had been made to procure a confession from Bolers, which, it was generally believed, would have liberally contributed to clearing up the mystery surrounding Zeke's end. Even now, John's friends had those stationed at Tom's place of confinement prepared, at the moment of crisis, to take Tom Bolers' dying statement, if the dying man could, or could be prevailed upon to, give one. And so the hour of hazard for De's brother, as well as Nance's, came on without postponement.

On the day of John Braddock's trial, Brad Simons was among the earliest arrivals in T——. As he passed through the town, he nodded good naturedly to Bob Likkum and others standing in chat beneath the long, rambling, old fashioned balcony porch of the hotel; and paused, for a moment, under the great trees fronting the country tavern. Rachel Bolers, with a quick, pre-occupied air, came walking past. She saw Simons and, in an abrupt sort of way, half halted as if to speak. Simons perceived the action and with a grave and self possessed manner of apparently considerate respect, said,

"I am glad to see you about again, Rachel. I hear you have been ailing some."

Without seeming to pay any attention to Brad's remark, Rachel Bolers asked:

"Will John Braddock be acquitted?" and then added, not waiting for a reply: "It's said he will be."

"Why, yes, to speak frankly," returned Brad. "I think he will be."

"Well, I'm glad—certainly, mighty glad to hear it,—nach'ly,—my da'ter's husband. I understand," pursued Rachel, with abrupt bluntness, "'at ye're makin' up to De Braddock."

"Now, now, Rachel," good humoredly remonstrated Simons, "you must not believe everything you hear."

"But ye don't deny it," persisted the woman peering curiously into Brad's face; "an' I see," she added, with a peculiar laugh, "'s about true."

"Well," said Simons, with an air of affected despair, "supposin' I am—what then?"

"Be sure ye ketch yer fish afore ye fry 'em," was the other's unexpected reply, with which she passed unmoved on her way.

"What does the creature mean?" thought Simons, with a sudden quick thrill of instinctive suspicion and alarm. He stood looking after the woman's receding figure, long after she had departed, and, at last, turned on his heel, muttering, "She knows too much,—has Jump—? Pshaw!—that marriage agreement with Mona Walker: He, certainly, has not let the old rip have it."

*As was to be expected on the occasion of a case involving such widespread interest, the courtroom was crowded upon the arraignment of John Braddock, on trial for the alleged murder of Ezekiel Smithin. Nance, John's wife, with their child Nanny, was, of course, with her husband; and Mother Braddock and Uncle Peter occupied places of comfort and prominence by the side of their son. De sat near John, and William White was

*The trial case for the murder of Zeke Smithin occupied several days. The selection of the jury alone consumed much time. The present abridged narrative of the singular and uncommon proceedings is interestingly adapted, by the author, to the requirements of literary art and natural effect.—Ed.

with her. Esau the Braddock farmboy, and Smoky Billings, the two having become great friends, together with Parson Woods and Bob Likkum, made conspicuous and interested members of the throng of neighbors and acquaintances present. Billings was observed to watch White closely. Smoky wore the aspect of being on the lookout for something to happen,—he appeared to scarcely know just what. A crowd of miscellaneous sightseers had been drawn to the courthouse from real interest or passing curiosity. The sheriff was there to preserve order; and his sympathetic and encouraging hand had been the first to clap Uncle Peter on the back, the action being accompanied by words of hope and good cheer; and his smile of kindly support had early supplied a token of encouragement to John Braddock. Simons' heavy frame loomed portentiously near John's lawyer; and the pale face of Jason Jump could be seen, cold, set and rigid, in the midst of the general gathering. Ann Mariah Saunders had come in town along with Bob, and sat beside Likkum and Parson Woods. Even Mona Walker was there; and Job Saunders, Widow Walmsey and the only just returned Cy—Cy Saunders,—he of the erstwhile supposed recreant desertion of the rooftree of the Saunders' homestead,—squinted nearsightedly and cheerfully from afar, in the background of the commodious and crowded courtroom.

The trial was opened for the state by the prosecuting attorney, who announced that this was a case in which John Braddock, the prisoner at the bar, stood charged with the murder of one Ezekiel Smithin, under a true bill of indictment rendered by the grand jury; that the prosecution was there to see justice in so flagrant a crime fairly and impartially administered, and he hoped, to so praiseworthy and necessary an end, that, as he did not doubt would be the case, he would have

the conscientious, careful and faithful co-operation of the jury.

“The state, gentlemen of the jury,” said the state’s attorney, leveling an expressive forefinger forcefully at the twelve men, “will show that, prior to the death of the deceased, the prisoner had threatened the life of the former; that the defendant was animated by the most powerful of all motives for the taking of life — that of revenge. It is not in the province of the law, gentlemen of the jury, to sympathize with, any more than to denounce, those feelings which, it may be made to appear by the advocate for the defense, either worthily or otherwise might have inspired John Braddock to respond to an impulse to slay one who had insulted, maybe most odiously and even vilely insulted, a member of the sacred precincts of home — one who, in fact, had slurred the mother of his child, the wife of his bosom,— nor will it be the province of the law to desire, nor of the jury in this case to permit, mere idle sentimentality to govern your deliberations — your verdict. It will be the duty of each and every individual member of this jury to solely and carefully concern himself with the existence or the non-existence of a wanton and lawless taking of human life, outside of the protection and the rights which the law and the code give to all members of society, alike, in the defense of their lives, their property and natural obligations. The unwritten law of sentimental justification often affords the most dangerous and violent safety for bloodthirsty and reckless natures to kill, with but the heat of unreasoning anger to spur them on. Beware allowing the appeal to such emotions, gentlemen of the jury, to influence you. It may be all too easy to find yourselves, by an adroit and telling address to your feelings aroused by descriptions of outraged honor and decency, governed and swayed

to an almost uncontrollable extent,— even finally caused, in your finding, to acquit a vicious and unsafe criminal. My own position, may it please the court and you gentlemen, would be one of great and unfeigned regret, were I permitted to recognize a personal element in the administration of justice. The defendant, in this case, we will admit, has long held a place of trust and confidence in your midst. He has grown up amongst those of this community. In this section of the state, he is now a prosperous, respected and well to do man of business. He is an exemplary husband and a kind and affectionate father,— a faithful and devoted son, brother and friend. But, as much as it may appear, that is not enough, of itself, to acquit him of crime. If he can be shown to have taken, without legal justification, the life of a fellow creature, the law must take its course and you must find him guilty. Gentlemen of the jury, I am here, under solemn oath, with yourselves, to see that justice and the law be properly, faithfully administered. I could not, any more than yourselves, if I would, escape the solemn and trying, I may say the even painful, duty and responsibility under which this court, in all of its parts and branches, rests to discharge its vital task of obligation and of conscience. Should the law and the evidence convict the prisoner at the bar, it will be incumbent upon you, gentlemen, to so make your verdict; should the law and the evidence acquit him, it will be equally your duty to set him free. It remains for me to further state that it will be shown, the prisoner, prior to the killing of the deceased had been financially much embarrassed, having been indebted in a large sum of money which, following the death of Ezekiel Smithin, he at once paid and paid with bills which will be conclusively proven to have belonged at the time of his death, to the deceased in this case.”

When the prosecuting attorney had finished his opening remarks, it was generally conceded that he had made a strong and unbiased impression and a statement displaying ability and force.

The state, deemed it suitable, at this point, to establish the *corpus delicti*, and the finding of the dead body of Smithin was proven. It was shown that the body of the dead man had, through causes as yet apparently unknown, been discovered buried in a brush heap located in a ditch, by the roadside. The head had been crushed, seemingly by contact with some blunt instrument. It had been understood, and testimony to that effect was produced, that the supposedly murdered man was, at the time of his death, returning home with a large sum of money won at a neighboring gambling house. It was developed that, when found, the body had presumptively been stripped of all valuables. The prosecution then called its star witness, Brad Simons, to the witness stand.

Brad's testimony was marked by reluctance. He was manifestly ill at ease in the consciousness of De's presence and looked, as his utterances from time to time seemed unusually severe on her brother, deprecatingly in her direction. He first testified to his being present at the time of the quarrel between Zeke Smithin and John Braddock, when the latter had threatened Smithin's life; and to overhearing the deadly and implacable menace made use of by John Braddock. Upon being questioned further by the prosecuting attorney, he testified to hearing others say that the prisoner had repeated his threats in their presence following the quarrel with Smithin.

This latter was objected to by the defense as being in the nature of hearsay evidence and was withdrawn, by the state, until later in the trial, when such repeated

threats on John's part were established within the rules of the court.

The prosecuting counsel now handed the witness a slip of paper.

"Please state whether or not you recognize that paper," directed the lawyer.

"I do," answered the witness.

"What is it?" asked the prosecuting officer for the state.

"A note of hand from John Braddock to myself," replied Brad Simons.

"Has it been paid?"

"It has,—that is, it was taken up with the money,—well, you see, with the money taken from Smithin; and that money is in question," rejoined Brad, alive to the prospect of losing the debt which the note under consideration represented.

"Precisely; that is enough, we will come to that later," said the attorney. "Now, you may be good enough, Mr. Simons, to state for the benefit of the court and the jury, the circumstances as to the payment of this paper: How was the note paid?"

It was here that Brad Simons began to detail, at length, the history of the settlement of John Braddock's debt to the stockman; how the latter was surprised, that the debtor should, after having only a short while before appeared much embarrassed for ready money, suddenly and unexpectedly ask to be allowed to take up his obligation.

"Your honor," exclaimed the counsel for the defense, rising, "this is not right. We are not concerned, in the laws of evidence prevailing in this or any court, with the witness's surprise nor his comments."

The court cautioned the witness to narrate those events only which attended the actual payment of the

note, together with but such circumstances as might tend to throw light upon the prisoner's alleged connection with the crime for which he was being tried.

Simons, thereupon, continued and related how he had discovered, on meeting the faro dealer of whom Zeke had won, that a certain peculiarly marked bill was one in which the dealer had paid Smithin the latter's winnings. It was afterwards brought out, in the cross examination, that Simons had deliberately sought the gambler for the explicit purpose of identifying the marked money. This circumstance, in view of the fact that Brad had received the bill directly from John Braddock, voicing suspicion of John did not have the effect of increasing the favor in which the cattleman was held by the sister of John Braddock. Brad Simons, then, proceeded to say that upon this important revelation, connected as it was with the fact that Zeke Smithin had been found evidently murdered and robbed, he had been prompted to speak of his discovery; and the prisoner's arrest had followed. Again the attitude of Simons in the case appealed most unpleasantly to De Braddock, who followed with the utmost interest the stockman's testimony. For the first time, De realized that Brad had been the cause of John's arrest.

What with the irregularities with which the evidence of Brad Simons was given, owing to his extreme and unquestionable desire to avoid offense to De, and the technical interruptions on the part of the lawyers, this substantially closed Brad's part in the trial. He had already been shown the marked bill and had identified it as the one with which the younger Braddock had, in part, paid his note. In effect and by the natural and unavoidable as well as legal force of his recital, the subtle trader willingly or otherwise had involved John Braddock in a situation of apparent and serious danger,

—one which, without the intervention of unseen aid, would require, for the prisoner's rescue all the skill with which Brad, together with others in the case, had struggled to establish John Braddock's *alibi*.

There here followed, on the part of other witnesses called for the state, strong corroborative testimony to the prisoner's hostile animus toward Zeke Smithin, as shown in Brad Simons' preceding evidence. It appeared, in fact, that John had been so incensed and angered by Smithin's conduct that he had expressed himself following Zeke's visit to his wife, with unaccustomed freedom and bitterness; denouncing the vagabond in deadly and unmeasured terms and expressing, in unsparing language, his feelings on the subject of the community's attitude, in certain quarters, relating to his wife Nance and their own singular and unusual marriage.

A few minor and comparatively immaterial points being covered, after this, by the state, the defense took the case.

All this time, William White with an occasional look in the direction of Smoky Billings and another in that of Benjamin Grigscomb, John Braddock's lawyer, sat silent and absorbed, following intently every varying phase of the famous and critical trial. Now and then he shifted uneasily in his chair, as if prompted by some anxious, secret and unspoken anticipation. Still occupying a place in the crowd, and with a face as cold and expressionless as unchiseled marble, was Jason Jump.

Benjamin Grigscomb, bald headed, forty years of age, in the law passionless, rose for the defense. In his opening he was brief. Mr. Grigscomb touched but little upon those things said by the state's attorney; came, at once, to what he esteemed the essential of his own position in

the interest of his client, the prisoner now on trial—an *alibi*.

“The defense will show,” proceeded the prisoner’s lawyer, in a plain and direct manner, “that, whatever else may underlie the merits of my learned and able brother’s remarks (indicating the prosecuting attorney), nothing of the state’s contention bearing upon the alleged killing of Ezekiel Smithin by the hand of the defendant, John Braddock, can have any weight with this jury, as we will prove, beyond all doubt, that the prisoner at the bar was not present and could not have been present at the scene of the alleged murder. We are not trying John Braddock for robbery—the indictment reads “murder.” Unless, therefore, it can be proven that the defendant had some collusion with the murderer for robbery, I fail to see where the marked money, as evidence, has legally any place in this trial. It proves nothing, absolutely nothing, as to who killed Zeke Smithin. We have no evidence to show that the accused man could have inspired another to commit this murder for any purpose, whatsoever,—indeed, the state makes no attempt at any such a demonstration. You will be told, at the right time, that the marked bill was given Braddock in satisfaction of debt; and that he had no knowledge, of any kind, of the original source from whence it came.

“I repeat, my client is charged with murder. The defense will show that he could not have committed or been guilty of this murder, in any way. There the defense rests. It is unnecessary for me to cordially indorse the uncontested character of the defendant.”

Mr. Grigseomb sat down rather abruptly; and, by his brevity, it was plain that the prosecution was taken by surprise. De looked as if she didn’t quite understand; but remembering her many and vital conferences with

Brad Simons, and the part assigned herself in the passing tragedy, she was constrained to bide in patience till further developments assisted in clearing up her way of promised relief at the hands of her wily and unscrupulous suitor. So the trial dragged its weary length along.

"Call Ash Plummer," directed Lawyer Grigscomb for the defense, addressing himself to the proper court official, and indicating his first witness.

Ash Plummer, a grizzled, old and honest-looking farmer, his beardless face seamed and weather beaten, came forward.

"Take the stand please," said Grigscomb.

The witness did so.

Brad Simons glanced furtively at De; the latter leaned forward simultaneously with the witness taking the stand, a look of anxious expectation on her face. Brad had experienced great difficulty at best, in explaining to the tried sister of John Braddock the legal character of his own attitude to her brother's trial. Now, however, that the slow grinding of the machinery, which the cattleman had assisted so singularly in setting in motion, had begun he felt more at his plotting ease, and serenely filled with a securer confidence in his ability to possess the object of his crazed and desperate infatuation, De Braddock.

"State your name to the court," said Benjamin Grigscomb to his first witness.

"My name," said the old man on the stand, "is Ash Plummer."

"What is your occupation?" was the next question, in form.

"Farmer," replied the witness.

"Where do you live, Mr. Plummer?" questioned John Braddock's lawyer.

"Nigh about a mile an' a half south uv town," answered Plummer.

"Where were you on the night before the day on which Mr. Smithin's dead body was found?"

"T' hum'."

"You were at home. How near is your home to the spot on which the dead body of Smithin was found, Mr. Plummer?" inquired the leading lawyer for the defense, after conferring in a low tone with a colleague who was assisting in the case.

"Nayborhood uv seventy-five yard," was the witness's ready reply.

Grigscomb's legal associate, here, leaned over and spoke gravely and privately to White, as a result of his chief's recent consultation with himself.

William White and Smoky Billings had exerted themselves, in every way in their power, to gain some knowledge that might throw light on the meaning of the outlaw leader's words spoken in the old mill, affecting the Smithin case. Their efforts, notwithstanding, had been fruitless. It was, now, in a last design to get the evidence of White and Billings before the jury, for its moral and general effect, that William White was seen to be additionally interested with John's lawyers and defense.

"Did anything unusual occur in your neighborhood, on the night privous to the finding of the body of the deceased?" was the next question Grigscomb put to Plummer.

"Calk'late that 'ere wuz uhhout whut happened?" sociably replied Ash.

"Something unusual happened. Will you kindly tell the jury what took place, on the night before the discovery of this body occurred, in your neighborhood,—

whether you heard any noise, in the road, as of violence or the like being committed?"

"I object to the question as tending to lead the witness," interposed the prosecuting attorney.

"Please change the form of your question," considerably directed the court, addressing itself to the lawyer for the defense.

"Very well, your honor," replied Grigscomb affably. "What occurred in your neighborhood, on the night before the finding of the body of the deceased?" inquired the lawyer, once more speaking to the witness.

"I heerd, a leet'le north uv me, a hollerin', an' I went out ter see what wuz the matter. When I git out inter th' road the hollerin' 'd stopped, so I went on up in th' pertikler d'rection where 't sounded, an' at fu'st couldn't see nothin', 't all; but I looked clost and seen signs where 't 'peared 'sif a lot uv scufflin' 'd gone on in the road."

"Was this near the point where the body was found?" inquired John's lawyer glancing at the jury, most of whom were countrymen and farmers from the neighboring lands.

"Jes' at the side uv the ditch where 'twas af'erwards got out, by the fellers, nex' day," replied Plummer promptly.

"What else did you see?"

"Didn't see nothin' else spechul jes' then, 'cept 'at they wuz a bay horse a-standin' in th' road, an' it trotted off w'en I kum up."

"Did you hear anything more?"

"Heerd another hoss a-gallopin' like all possessed down the road."

Grigscomb suddenly beckoned White, who came quickly over to the side of the lawyer. The latter, his legal associate and the literary man appeared to consider

briefly for a moment; then Grigscomb, with a composed face, turned back to the waiting witness. White returned to his accustomed seat by the side of De, followed by the jealous, malevolent look of Brad Simons.

"You say, Mr. Plummer, you did not see anything further, especially, just then. What else did you see, later?"

"I seen some feller a-scratchin' off like the mischief wuz after 'im—a-runnin', you un'erstan', off through th' fiel's."

"Did you make any effort to stop him?" queried Grigscomb.

"Hollered—did, I did, but he kep' a-goin'," answered the witness.

"You did not catch up with the party who was seen running?"

"No, sir."

"Did you see the body of anyone who might have been injured, or otherwise affected by assault, attack or violence of any kind?"

"No, sir."

"By the way, Mr. Plummer," further questioned the lawyer for the defense, "did you have a light with you?"

"Keeried a lantern," replied Plummer.

"Was the night very dark?"

"Couldn't see much wethout a lantern," returned the old man.

"Did you see the body of Smithin?" asked the lawyer.

"No, sir."

"Well, now, Mr. Plummer, suppose there had been trouble somewhere, at some such a place as this point in the road we are discussing; and suppose there had been the form of a man left dead at that point; and suppose

the circumstances of the finding, afterwards, of that dead body were similar to those attending the discovery of the body of the deceased in this case, what would have prevented you in your position, and carrying a lighted lantern, from seeing the body?"

Answering the lawyer's hypothetical question, the witness said:

"A body placed same ez Smithin's wuz would uv b'en hid by th' bresh, which somep'n' had throw'd thuh body inter, in ther ditch."

"So the brush would have hidden any object so described from your notice?"

"Yes, sir."

"What time did this disturbance, we have just been speaking of, occur?" asked John's lawyer.

"'Twuz jes' 'leven o'clock," was the unhesitating reply.

"How do you know?"

"'At's whut th' clock to my house said, an' it's mos' giner'ly right," replied the farmer.

"That will be all, I believe, Mr. Plummer. I mean," added John Braddock's attorney in explanation, as he perceived the witness hesitate, "that you can step down, unless," and he turned to the prosecuting attorney, "you wish to question him."

Upon cross examination it was plain that Ash Plummer had sworn to the truth.

The next witness called by the defense was Doctor Swathburn, old now, having attended De Braddock's first appearance in the world's trial of life.

The trusted and venerable old doctor plucked the tangles out of his flowing white beard and viewed those about him in the courtroom, with mild interest. To many of them, as in the case of De, he had extended the introductory hand at birth. Like with the knowing and the

old, he had obtained somewhere an inkling of the way things stood between John's sister and Brad Simons; although unaware of anything suggesting the employment, by them, of means outside of the written law for the sueor of her brother. He fixed a kindly and discerning gaze upon De's countenance of absorbed interest.

"Doctor," said Grigseomb, following upon the formalities of installing the witness, you examined the deceased in this case, I believe, after the discovery of the dead body was made, did you not?"

"I did," replied the physician.

"How soon after the body was found did you make your examination, doctor?"

"Immediately."

"About what hour of the day was this?"

"Ten or eleven o'clock in the morning."

"How long, in your opinion had the man been dead?"

"A number of hours."

"A number, eh? Five or twelve—or——?"

"Might have been twelve hours," replied Swathburn.

"*Might* have been?" queried the defense.

"Yes, sir,—all of that," repeated the doctor, positively.

Again Grigseomb leaned over and conferred with his colleague.

"That will be all, doctor," he then announced.

This was all the examination to which Dr. Swathburn was put by the defense which had now established, by the strongest possible inference, the time of the killing to have been at eleven o'clock on the night prior to the finding of Zeke Smithin's dead body; Ash Plummer's evidence, together with that of Swathburn, strongly tending to fix the occurrence of the catastrophe as having transpired on the night before Zeke's body was

found. It only remained for the defense to prove John Braddock's whereabouts at a point other than at that of the presumed murder.

The prosecution eliciting nothing of further interest, from Doctor Swathburn, the old physician was dismissed.

There was a stir in the crowded courtroom when Delia Braddock, the sister of the prisoner, was put on the witness stand. Brad Simons had had his way. "Someone must be found to testify to seeing John in front of the hotel," where he claimed to have been on the night of the murder. Someone had been found. She was that "someone," although she had not seen him. They had been unable to find anyone who had. Simons had finally gained her confidence, showed her the way, coaxed, cajoled, persuaded. She had yielded. And she had placed herself, as she accepted her fate, forever in his power. She was pale and composed, showing apparently but the strain natural to one in her trying and distressing position.

"Miss Braddock," said Grigscomb soothingly, "will you please state to the jury where you were, on the night preceeding the morning on which the dead body of Ezekiel Smithin was found?"

"I spent the night here in town," was the response.

"You spent the night here in town. Will you tell the jury, just in your own way, what happened during that night?" interrogated the lawyer kindly.

"My teacher—my old teacher Miss Primvale was very ill, and I had come into town from the farm to be with her for the night. Along in the evening it became apparent that she would need a fresh supply of medicines, and I went to get it for her. I went to the drug store and wakened Mr. Block, the proprietor, and he came down and let me in."

"Your honor," said the counsel for the state, rising in his place, "I really regret interrupting the witness, but it is my duty to ask what has all this to do with the case?"

"May it please the court," rejoined Grigsecomb quickly on his feet, with the tips of his fingers resting upon the table in front of him, "it is essential to show the movements of Miss Braddock, on the night in question, in order to make clear to the court and jury the manner in which she saw her brother."

"The court will allow the witness to proceed," ruled the bench.

"What time," said Mr. Grigsecomb returning to De, "was it, Miss Braddock, when you reached the drug store?"

"About half past ten, lacking a minute or two."

"Are you positive?"

"Oh, yes," responded De, with quiet assurance.

"How do you know?" asked the attorney for the defense.

"The requirements of the sick room, in Miss Primvale's case, made it necessary to note the time in order to properly administer her medicine," replied the witness.

"What time was it when you left the store?"

"Nearly eleven."

"What did you do, when you left the store?"

"I started directly home, or rather to Miss Primvale's."

"The roads are lonely," the assault upon De was yet remembered; "had you no company for protection?" asked counsel considerably.

"I was alone. Miss Primvale insisted upon my carrying a weapon—a pistol, which she always keeps in her house."

“What did you do, after you started for the house of Miss Primvale?”

De struggled, for a moment apparently with her feelings. Would she break down? thought the lawyer. It was evident to all that the nervous strain, under which the young woman was laboring as the principle witness for her brother's life, would make it a grave question whether or not she could proceed. The truth is, up to this point in her evidence in the trial De Braddock had testified to only that which had actually transpired; it was now necessary to swear she had seen John, at eleven o'clock, in front of the hotel, which she had not done. The girl became gradually more composed. She answered the last question addressed to her, by the counsel for the defense, and the trial came to its abrupt—its remarkable and unexpected conclusion.

“I hastened to get back to Miss Primvale,” went on De; “and was just crossing the street and approaching the Travers House, *when I saw my brother John standing in front of the hotel.*”

—In her pure and exalted mood of self-sacrifice, love and devotion it is really a grave and serious question whether, under the spell of a strange, spiritual and hypnotic consciousness, De Braddock was not convinced that she actually saw,—at the time of her testimony, had subconscious knowledge of John's presence in front of the hotel.—They say, such things are possible, and, for one, I believe they are. At all events the weighty and important incident has been most faithfully given.

There was a sudden commotion in the courtroom, and a man from without was seen hurriedly making his way through the crowded attendance. The case was suspended, for a moment, when the clerk of the court, after a hasty and earnest explanation from the new arrival, whispered something to the judge. The latter beckoned

the attorneys for the defense and commonwealth to the bench. There was a brief conference marked by deep attention, on the part of counsel; and, turning to those present, his honor announced that, in view of some new and important developments, the court would take a recess.

CHAPTER XLI.

ACQUITTAL.

"What do ye hear?" questioned one countryman of another, as the two, in from their farms, stood gawking about the public square of T——, at a late hour in the afternoon of the day on which De's testimony had been interrupted in so sudden and unlooked for a manner; "any news? How's Hiram Braddock, Peter's Kaintucky kin, a-gittin'?"

"W'y got right spry, now," replied the second countryman.

"That so,—he'll git well, then?" returned the first countryman.

"Yes, reckon," said the second countryman, and accurately hit a pebble in the roadway with a stream of tobacco juice, shot with unerring nicety at the stone.

The chewer worked the contents of his jaws meditatively, for a moment, and spoke.

"Heerd about whut he said?" queried the second countryman looking carefully around for another pebble.

"Huh,—," interrogated the first countryman—"heerd,—what—who said?"

"Hiram," replied the second countryman.

"Hain't heerd nuthin'—Hiram nur nobuddy's said. Hiram bin a-talkin'?" replied number one.

"Found out how he got hurted," said the second countryman.

"Who—how Hiram got hurted?" asked the first countryman.

"Yep," indifferently rejoined the second countryman.

"How?" asked the first countryman.

"Hiram," replied number two, "'jus' kum ter 'is senses, an' tells 'at it wuz dark, an' him ridin' 'cross kentry on biz'ness, an' Hiram, ackeeridental, rid' into someun', which it wuz Zeke Smithin, on ther Wabash Road, while Hiram wuz a-comin' frum the East Crossin' inter thuh pike; an' they both went down; and, arter that, Hiram, whose head wuz hurted, must 'a' wandered around erazy-like."

"That 'ere night Zeke Smithin wuz kilt?" said the first countryman.

"Same night," was the other's reply.

"An' Hiram wuz th' innercent cause o' Zeke's death?" said countryman number one, with quick perception.

"That's it," answered the second countryman.

Another silence followed, during which the leading spirit in this curbstone trial found and plentifully besprinkled several pebbles. After chewing for a spell of thoughtful silence, the irrigator of the small stones about once more observed:

"Did ye hear?"

"Hear what? dad bing it!" replied the first countryman, with a show of some irritation. "W'at a feller ye are,—hear w'at—w'y don't ye say?"

The second countryman immovably spat and chewed and said,

"Confessin of Tom Bolers, afore he died of that 'air fever, in the jail."

"No," eagerly said the first countryman, forgetting

his impatience of a moment before in this savory bit of news,—“did he?”

“Confess? Yep; an’ he sez somethin’ thet ’u’d seem ter go ter kerroberatin’ Hiram, an’ he’p clear up the hull thing: Tom, snookin’ aroun’, sez ’at he foun’ Zeke,” continued the second countryman, “a-layin’ dead, along about midnight, an’ simply tuk ther money off’n the kurps,” (it has been determined that the rustic narrator meant “corpse”), “an’—”

“Say,” said a third countryman, coming up at that instant, “John Braddock’s bin acquitted.”

Zeke Smithin was thus decided to have been killed by being violently thrown from his horse as a result of a collision, in the dark, with Hiram Braddock.

Tom Bolers, at the eleventh hour, had made a confession before he died, which opportunely arrived to add its convincing weight to John Braddock’s triumph.

And so the case, with the shadows still pursuing, passed into history.

There was a general buzz of satisfaction over the result; and John held a reception, shaking hands with everybody. De was happy, or, at least, she thought she was. She had expected it. John was at liberty; and it was destiny. Brad’s claim upon her would have to be met. It never occurred to her to qualify Simons’ demands by the unlooked for results of the trial. She had expected to abide, in any event, by the consequences of her sacrifice. Brad had shown her the way. Regrets had no place for her; and she stifled them and put them away, if they seemed to cry out for recognition.

But we warrant, there will be better and happier days; for here is Bob Likkum and Ann Mariah, and, wonder of wonders! Job, with a hat of the latest block upon his head, and the widow on his arm, and Likkum not saying a word. And Bob is talking earnestly and

confidentially with a grizzled, old, miner-looking fellow, who has a squint of prime good nature in his eye, and calling him Cy—and all understand that Cy Saunders has come back; and has come back as rich as California and all the other gold mines of the far west can make him, although he did come near getting drowned in trying to reach home through the storm, and surprise his people!

And backing up these cheering scenes is a square-rigged vessel, by name of Smoky—Smoky Billings; and another staunch craft, by name of White—William White.

The scene is again in front of the country tavern.

White speaks to Simons. Simons returns the salutation.

Rachel Bolers approaches the two men.

“Ye’re onlucky, William,” says the woman, of a naturally strange and grotesque humor at best, and addressing White. “I hear ’at Brad ’ll git De, after all,” and she laughs, oddly.

“Is that so, Rachel?” says William White pleasantly, and glancing quizzically into Simons’ face.

De has just left Uncle Peter, who remains nearby. There is, on De’s part, a native, trusting, childlike confidence in William White, that, after all is said and done, can never lose its being, and she pauses trustfully at William’s side.

At a lurking suggestion in the woman’s tones, conveying an indefinable menace to himself, Brad Simons gives a start.

“Who’s been saying such things?” quickly says the girl, her face coloring and clouding, as she darts a sharp glance at Simons. De has breathed “such things” to no living soul, herself, save to the brooding cattleman standing at her side.

"First ketch yer fish, I sez, again, Brad," says Rachel, innocently, and turning, with no other explanation, away, "afore ye fry 'em," and the woman, without further remark, is gone.

What did this continued suggestion of Rachel Bolers, that there was something doubtful in his hold on De Braddock, mean? in alarmed suspicion again thought Brad Simons. With long knowledge of Rachel's secret connection with the outlaws, and his own information concerning the bank-stolen marriage agreement which he had made with Mona Walker, Simons' fears were thoroughly aroused by this reiteration, on the part of the singular woman, of her warning. Should it be that there was on foot a design to invalidate or prejudice to his defeat his intention to wed De Braddock, by, at the last moment, springing his promise to marry his housekeeper upon him, he saw, at once, they had him trapped—trapped! It must not be—it drove him wild to think of losing her. It must not be! He must do something—take instant steps to prevent the destruction of his plans, his hopes. He could denounce the marriage agreement as a forgery,—but, no, that might not succeed.

He turned to De.

"You," in his doubt and uncertainty, he was halting in his usual confident, successful and overbearing address to her defenses, thus giving her subsequently the opportunity to unconsciously drive him hopelessly into the meshes of his own toils: De's ensuing manner was not influenced by any realization of Simons' villainy, whatever,—in fact, her best weapon was really her entire innocence of any wrong motives. . . . "You," again began the temporarily baffled schemer endeavoring to smile agreeably,—“you are happy in your brother's release, Miss De. May,” he more boldly and assertively inquired,—“may I have the pleasure of private con-

gratulations?" it had reached the point with him of settlement, at any cost, of his unpleasant and disturbing doubts.

He had lost his sense and power of supreme mastery, however, and De Braddock, given option, looked coldly at the man. Uninspired by any purpose of breaking with Brad; but, still offended and deeply so in her sense of maidenly delicacy at what she construed to be Simons' betrayal of their sacred and sentimental understanding, she replied, with studied coldness and meaning:

"Another time, Mr. Simons, and in better faith, I shall hope to prove worthier of such kindness."

"But, De," impulsively and explosively broke in the stockman when, none too well pleased in the company of Simons at any time, De started with William White to join her father.

Brad Simons felt instinctively that he was losing her. Rage possessed him. He swore beneath his breath. He impotently gnashed his teeth at thought of what, to his excited and inflamed suspicions, was the certain confirmation of his worst apprehensions.

"I'll have her," he ground out in deadly earnest, "if it takes life, farm and all."

Simons wheeled, as if seeking an instrument to carry out his designs. The occupants of the courtroom were scattering after the trial of Braddock had been concluded, and Jason Jump stood not far off. The latter revolutionary was just preparing to move away, when Brad's roving glance perceived him. Simons had not met Jump since the day in town, when the cattleman had angrily withdrawn from the company of his sinister outlaw acquaintance. Brad Simons intercepted the outlaw.

"De," said William, as the two moved away together,

leaving Simons alone, "I am forced to speak plainly: Brad Simons is not a good man."

De was silent. She could not, for some reason connected with an instinctive recognition of Simons' class, utter a syllable in the defense of one to whom she had tacitly pledged herself as the price of John's redemption and release.

"I have, lately, learned enough," went on her companion, in a grave voice, "without in the beginning knowing aught of what you may have deemed best to agree to with Simons, to think that you have been induced to listen to some proposition from this man, in your brother's case." She made a movement. "You need not speak," said White quickly, "but will you delay committing yourself irrevocably," continued he, "until, at least, you have heard further from me?"

And William White could not, at the moment, bring himself to tell her what the operations of Smoky Billings and himself had resulted in. He knew that the character of the information he possessed against Simons was such as no girl, occupying the position which De occupied, could, for a moment, allow to pass unrebuked. He had intended to take Peter Braddock and De's mother into his confidence; but, by reasons of one and another of the absorbing affairs of the past few days, had, as yet, been prevented from doing so.

De was content to promise the respite asked; and William, reassured, left her side; and, in a happier frame of mind than he had enjoyed for many days, saw her drive away homeward in the red wagon with her father and mother.

"Jump," said Simons, nervously advancing upon the leader of the desperadoes whom, but a moment before the promise to William White which De had just given,

Brad had accosted, "have you that marriage agreement, still?"

"No," replied the robber. "It's disappeared. Don't know how," and he looked curiously and intently at Simons, while evidently wondering vainly what had so soon changed the latter's previous unfriendly disposition towards himself. With a peculiar maliciousness he added: "Gone; some of Rachel Bolers' crazy tantrums, reckon."

In this last shot, Jump, it is conjectured from subsequent events, had tipped his shaft with a secret and lasting appreciation he had conceived of Rachel's deadly animus to Simons—an appreciation obtained in his character of the outlaw chieftain—together with a shrewd knowledge that the woman, in some way possibly known to himself alone, had obtained from the robbers possession of the document so disastrous to Simons' present peace of mind. He, likewise, had no difficulty in surmising that the use she would make of the paper would be to thwart the cattleman's designs upon De Braddock, if it were possibly in the power of Nance's implacable mother to do so. Such a course would gratify his own spite against Brad Simons for refusing to purchase the implicating marriage agreement with Mona Walker from the robber leader; and the same action, doubtless, in the end, would be expected to protect Mona, whom Jason Jump had informed Simons he meant to defend.

The desperate free-lance chieftain, however, had exploded a bomb which he could hardly have anticipated would wreak such havoc in its fiery results.

It was the last straw on the back of Simons' affrighted moral camel. Rachel Bolers' repeated warnings struck the base trickster and villain with full and fatal force. His naturally furious and uncertain temper was too much for him; and, remembering De's recent studied coldness, he broke into a sudden fury of

revilings and accusations of her too coarse or, in their all but insane confusion, too wild and disordered to repeat; unbridled jealousy, now mounting to a frenzy, drove him to hurl unspeakable epithets at the literary wooer of De, with whom he had just seen the object of his insane desires depart.

Jump, with the pale, chilled, expressionless face of a gambler, in risks, at first listened, in silence, to his companion's ungovernable ravings.

"What is it, Brad?" finally asked Jump, quietly

"If I thought," screamed the man rearing his massive form and towering height above his now aroused companion, as some monstrous and maddened wild beast trapped in his native jungle might have done, "that you had any hand in this——"

"Brad, recollect yourself," said Jump, in a low, warning tone.

"They've got it, I say," choked Simons, purple in the face.

"You're crazy,—got what?"

"They're going to get her from me, after all!" Jump's companion was frothing at the mouth now, black in the face—all but speechless.

"Brad, you've got to pull yourself together; then, if I can help you——"

"If, as you say," went on the laboring man gradually resuming control of himself, "that marriage agreement between Mona Walker and me has been secretly taken, from what I hear it's got into the hands of my enemies. They'll use it against me with De Braddock. I am convinced that is what has given them their confidence to brave me as they are doing."

"Well," coolly remarked the other, in order to further quiet Simons,—for it had been already noted, by the outlaw, that their unusual conference was attracting

passing attention,—“what, in the name of the god of Love, your little cupid boy, can *I* do?”

“I have a plan—join me in it,” cried Simons recklessly.

“Now see here, Brad,” diplomatically rejoined the other, craftily gaining time, “that, you know, depends on what you’re up to.

“We’re in the same boat—you and I,” retorted Brad Simons doggedly.

“In a measure, that’s true,” admitted Jump.

“In a measure?” sneered Simons.

“In a measure—yes,” returned the other man, coolly.

“Jason Jump, if I go down in this thing, you go with me, if you refuse now to stand by me,” and Brad Simons’ words were uttered with a cold blooded deliberation that carried conviction.

“What are you going to do?” the outlaw leader wasted no more time in skirmishing.

It was long that they wrangled and talked. They adjourned to a place of more privacy; and continued their discussion. Jump’s fate was in Simons’ hands. After a stormy time, when it looked, at moments, as if the life itself of the cattleman was in danger from the outlaw, the leader of the freebooters at the last gave in.

Simons’ climax of villainy had precipitated a condition of things such, as, in truth and tragic fate and among the many and appallingly evil things which Jason Jump had aimed at and been guilty of! offered escape and survival for the outlaw chieftain, only at the sacrifice of the remaining and cherished principle of the wretched man’s blasted and dishonored life—his poetic and chivalrous refusal to “make war on women!” And it had, at last, to be this with all the rest!—Well, it was De Braddock’s safety or his own,—so let it go—aye, what else! let it go.

CHAPTER XLII.

LOST.

“Father, De be lost!”

This startling exclamation was uttered by Mother Braddock, who, with a very white and anxious face, confronted Uncle Peter, when he came in, late in the afternoon, from the field.

“Shucks, mother,” said the old man, “the gal’s not a babby. What d’ye mean?”

Mother Braddock, who had, in common with the rights of all parents, never come to view her offspring in any other light than that of infancy, asserted anxiously, once more,

“Peter, I tell ye, the child be lost.”

Peter Braddock, hereupon, paused and leveled his gaze at Martha. “Marthy,” he said quietly, “whut do ye mean?”

Called upon to explain, the distressed woman said their daughter, some hours before, had gone across fields to a neighbor’s to get the loan of a household article. William White had called, in De’s absence, and, as the girl had not yet returned from her errand, Mrs. Braddock had knowingly suggested that William walk over alone and return with her. This, White had undertaken to do. His old sweetheart had, then, been gone beyond the time necessary to reach the farmhouse she had set out for. William White soon came back to Mrs. Braddock with the information that De had not been seen at the house for which she had left home, nor had he been able to learn anything concerning her. He, then, visited

the only other acquaintance likely to offer a tarrying point of country gossip for the maid; had learned nothing of the missing girl, and again returned to her mother to hear that the daughter was still unfound and to begin to share a part of Mrs. Braddock's uneasiness. White had, when Uncle Peter Braddock reached home, been gone some time since he started upon a final search. "What did it all mean?" was Martha Braddock's apprehensive appeal to the old farmer.

"There, there, mother, don't git excited. Now, ye know it'll be all right," said Uncle Peter in an attempt to quiet his wife's natural and anxious apprehensions.

But when, as the evening wore on and it grew late, no tidings came of De or William, Mr. Braddock too became possessed of Martha's fears. He stirred the farm-boy out, and, leaving him in charge with mother, went himself among the neighbors and, with them, into the surrounding country to seek for his missing daughter.

William White's living place, the Widow Walmsey's, was stopped at, and Uncle Peter learned that the writer had been there, directly after he left Uncle Peter's house the last time; and taken Smoky Billings, and the two had left White's place together. Peter Braddock, by this time nearly as much disturbed as Mother Braddock herself, came back to his own home. Mrs. Braddock, now wild with alarm, met him to say that no news had been received of the lost girl. Quieting his wife as well as possible, the old man at once distributed the neighbors who had joined him, directing some over the adjoining regions, and with his personal followers took the portion of territory he had assigned to himself. The hunt began.

The country, as Peter Braddock and Martha only too well knew, was still infested with the most desperate characters; and it was with the most anxious and serious

anticipations that Peter at last realized the vital nature of his search.

When De Braddock started to go to the neighbor's the sun was shining brightly, and the trees and fields were gleaming with the jewel drops with which recent rains had plentifully bedecked the woodland landscape. Her way lay across a meadow; and, on surmounting a fence, she found herself in a lane. The air was pure and fresh, and, in her glad release from the thrall of John's care, she inhaled the sweet and exhilarating scent of the fields and woods with a keen and even joyous sense of freedom. She moved briskly, throwing little loving words to the cattle, calves, sheep and lambs watching, with wide innocent eyes, the pretty damsel go by. She was passing a piece of wood when a man, whose face, where his broad black slouch hat left it visible, was almost covered with a great black beard, stepped from among the trees into the road directly in her path.

"Pardon me, miss," he said, in a deep, bass voice, "but, ez we're both goin' the same road, we might 's well be sociable like." The speaker looked up and down the narrow stretch between the fences, with a sweeping glance. There was no one in sight.

Before she could cry out, Black Hank had caught her firmly in his arms. A big, brawny hand was clapped securely over her mouth, and without power of outcry she was carried a helpless, struggling captive into the wood. Her senses became affected by a powerful odor from a cloth held, by her captor, against her mouth and nostrils; her struggles grew fainter, and she became unconscious.

The first she realized, after this, was the sound of running water; the swinging light of a lantern carried by a surly ruffian ahead of her, and rough arms which

encircled and conveyed her surely along a narrow, rocky path, in what seemed, to her newly awakened senses, to be a large cavern. She could see to the right a somber stream which lay, like a mysterious and deadly basilisk, gleaming from many orbs of light reflected in its dark and forbidding face from the lantern's dancing rays; and whose murmurous and even languorous wash and ebb had been the sound of flowing waters she had heard. On the left was a wall of solid rock.

It became a slowly growing comfort to her, as they proceeded, to gather, in some manner from the care taken of her person, that no immediate harm to her could be meditated. This brought, with its instinctive feeling of at least temporary security, a corresponding sensation of relief and confidence and, while she was conscious of all that had passed, De was able, with her natural courage, to reflect in a composed effort upon the motives which might have moved these men to bring her here. Before her and him who held her in his arms, still walked the bearer of the lantern. She found herself feeling a curious and wondering interest in the reflection of the unsteady light, in thousands of sparkling, gem-like rays from roof and walls and water. Her captors turned from the path, which they had been pursuing, into an extensive chamber hewn, as the girl perceived, by the magical hand of nature in the solid rock. She was carried across the width of the apartment and deposited not rudely upon a coarse pallet of straw, with which the place was already provided. Up to this time, the captive girl had not spoken.

"Here, Mother," exclaimed Black Hank, "look after the lady." Hank turned to Rachel Bolers, who sat on a low stool near the pallet, gazing, with a peculiar intentness, at the form reclining upon the straw.

"So you would do it, would ye," said the woman,

"though I told ye not to? You'll suffer for it—you'll suffer for it, I tell ye."

The prisoner was, at first, unable to tell whether this speech was addressed to herself or to the others in the cavern. She lay watching Rachel Bolers whom she, of course, knew, and was about to speak, when the leader of the desperadoes ejaculated impatiently,

"Hold yer squeak, will ye, ye ol' fool, er ye'll git doused in th' drink out there," extending his arm angrily in the direction of the lonely and mysterious body of water past which De had been brought. "Now, ye shut up."

"I won't shut up—you can't make me shut up—you can't—you can't—you can't!" screamed the woman, in an apparently sudden and wholly uncontrollable paroxysm of spleen and rage,—“an' I tol' ye not to take the gal."

"I can't, can't I?" grimly retorted Black Hank. "Here, you, Hen, take hold: when she gits in these tantrums, ye know she's got to be dealt with," and appealing to his follower for the necessary assistance to subdue Rachel Bolers in a supposed return of one of her irresponsible outbursts, the robber chieftain sprang upon the offending female.

The girl, likewise, leaped from the straw, where she lay. "You must not," she cried, endeavoring, by the use of all the power she possessed, to prevent the assault of the burly outlaw upon their female associate.

"See here, miss, we don't want any interference, er we'll have to tie ye both up, together," grimly observed the leader of the ruffians.

"Come, Hank," put in the now quiet voice of Rachel, "let the gal be. I ain't meanin' to give ye no trouble."

The astonished look that Black Hank turned upon the speaker, at this speech, brought a ringing laugh from

Rachel; and made even De smile, while the outlaw, called Hen, grinned with evident relish.

"Hain't ye a-goin' to hev' one uv yer fits, Rachel?" asked Hank, in a manner of such seemingly disappointed expectation that again Rachel Bolers' laugh rang through the cave.

"Not even to oblige you, Black Hank, with yer handsome face and big black beard," she shook her head slightly at De, or the latter fancied she did, and reseated herself upon the stool with an air of having closed the incident.

"Ye must be a-gittin' better," muttered Hank, in his confusion, "ez they sayed ye wuz."

Rachel Bolers seemed to pay no further attention to the presences about her, than to reach out with a natural gesture and draw the captive girl down upon the straw, once more.

"Poor gal!" was all she said.

William White, accompanied by Smoky Billings whose assistance he obtained when the writer had visited the Widow Walmsey's, set resolutely forth upon a search for the missing girl.

"What, to Billings, with his previous familiarity with the freebooters into whose company he had been thrown on his first arrival in the state, wore the appearance of a clue, soon presented itself. The two searchers met a farmer who told them of having seen, earlier in the day, a man of very suspicious actions lurking around the neighborhood of Peter Braddock's farm. The informant described the man, and Smoky Billings at once recognized the resemblance to Black Hank. He communicated his opinion to William White, and the latter confirming the likeness, the fearless tramp was the first to advise resort to the region in which acquaintance with the general locality haunted by the outcasts enabled

him to suppose their cave to be. Having deserted the band of outlaws before they reached the cavern, the night they kidnaped White, Smoky had, on occasion when his limited duties permitted, revisited the wild nook of country, which the two now sought, and spent more than one idle hour in a vain search for some method of entrance into the robbers' den.

Night had fallen, when they reached the region of their intended search, and, but for the light of the stars, it would have been quite dark. The desolate air worn by the surrounding landscape made it easy to understand the objection, on the part of the country people, to coming here, more than they could help. Held back by the popular belief that the locality was haunted, and by the terrorized subjection in which the freebooters kept them, the country folk had, as yet, put forth but little effort at unearthing the hiding place of the evil-doers. Few, if any, could be found so daring as to keep night watch in this infested region. It need, however, hardly be said of Smoky Billings and William White that circumstances had brought about their own presence on that questionable territory, at a time when all the reputed or actual ghosts from the dawn of being to that day would not have weakened their intention of rescuing De Braddock, if a captive in the hands of the outlaws.

They took a prudent position concealed among the trees and thickets, within view of a towering precipice which Smoky Billings' feeling told him might be connected with the robbers' cave. And here they waited. The stars alone gave light, owls hooted and whippoorwills called, and now a bat would dart, zigzag, across the face of the night—weird agents of nature to be employed by the cunning in the atmosphere of superstitious dread created to frighten the ignorant and timid soul. A slight

sound caught the listening ear of William White. Smoky Billings had, also, heard it. They crouched in breathless watchfulness.

"Look there!" exclaimed Smoky, in a scarcely audible whisper.

White strained his eyes. He perceived, not far off, a human head apparently slowly rising from the earth, at the foot of the beetling crags, in the midst of a growth of low bushes. Smoky laid a cautious and restraining hand upon his employer's arm.

"Wait, Mr. White," whispered the man, drawing from his pocket a huge navy six shooter, which he had provided himself with since the attack upon White by Simons' ruffians;—"I think, if necessary, I have a bit of a persuader here, that ought to do some good."

White, who was himself well armed, here carefully drew his own weapon.

The head in the bushes rose higher and higher until the form of a man stood erect, shadowed against the cliff. The apparition stooped and appeared to busy itself with some arrangements to be completed at its feet. After a moment the man stepped out of the clump of bushes, hesitated and then started in the direction of the place of concealment occupied by Smoky Billings and De's lover.

"Now, sir, stand by," directed Smoky.

The man, in their sight, moved forward briskly, and, unaware of their vicinity, was in the act of passing the hidden watchers when Smoky Billings, taking no chances, stepped out in front of him.

"Hands up," he commanded shortly, leveling his revolver at the other's head.

The man's hands went up.

"Mr. White, sir," calmly observed the former tramp, keeping his eyes fastened upon the surprised rob-

ber, "I thought I couldn't be mistaken. I remember this man, as one of them desperadoes what I was with, that night, they carried you off." The outlaw gave a perceptible start. "Will you please, sir, look after his weepsons?"

"So you're that sneakin', traitor, tramp-sailor we saved frum starvin', are you?" said Billings' prisoner, with a fierce oath, at the same instant in a quick movement, making an attempt to reach a weapon of his own.

There was a flash in the half darkness of the night, and Hen, Black Hank's first lieutenant, fell dead with a bullet through his brain.

"Sorry," said Billings as he bent above the fallen outlaw, holding his smoking navy in his hand, "but it had to be done. What's this, sir?" Smoky Billings picked off the ground, where it had fallen from the nerveless grasp of the dead robber, a small white handkerchief.

The two men examined it. With the help of a match they made out De Braddock's initials in one corner.

"We must get into that cave," said White, his face pale, tense and set.

The writer and the ex-tramp at once proceeded to the spot where they had first seen the outlaw, as he had risen from the earth and bushes. The arrangement was simple enough, but so cunningly contrived that those most familiar with the locality would have found it difficult to discover, without assistance, the cave's entrance. Cautiously testing the ground among the bushes it was easily discovered that the apparently solid earth gave back a hollow sound. Dirt, stone and dead brush removed, disclosed a trap made of common wood. This lifted, a short flight of steps led them, through an ample doorway in the underbase of the cliff, into a dark and dank subterranean passage.

A lantern stood just within the entrance to the cavern, and as a match flared in Smoky's fingers the means of additional light was found.

"I have been here, before," said De's lover; and, as they proceeded stealthily on their way into the earth, he, once more, related to Smoky Billings his own experience with the outlaws. The sparkling walls and ceilings flashed into Billings' eyes, as he listened again to the story of his friend and benefactor, and the rainbow hues of limpid light seemed to form a bow of promise for the morrow of their trials to the former rover of the deep.

"A rainbow, in the morning, is a sailor's warning;
A rainbow, at night, is a sailor's delight."

White retained a fair idea of the locality after, when formerly a prisoner in the hands of the outlaws, the cloth had been removed from his eyes and he had found himself, by lantern light, in the underground way; and, exercising great care, they were not long in arriving at the chamber in which the writer had once seen the recumbent form of the disordered Rachel Bolders, resting upon the pallet of straw. A flood of light streamed out through the lofty, arched doorway and fell across their path.

"Is that you, Hen," called a deep, rough voice, the caller, within the cavernous chamber, unseen by White or Billings, as the intruders' footsteps sounded in their approach to the apartment,—“what fetches yo' back so soon?”

But Hen was nevermore in present earthly flesh to answer call of chief or outlawed act.

Directing Smoky, in a low whisper, to place the lantern where the obscured rays would leave their persons in the shadow, William White peered intently and cautiously around the edge of the rocky portal. The

place had been brilliantly illuminated—the lamps, remembered by White, about the walls, with their now dazzling reflectors almost blinding his dusk-accustomed eyes. He perceived, at the farther side of the room, three figures,—one, sitting, was that of Rachel Bolers; another, the writer saw, was the captain of the outlaws, who was gazing, erect, in the direction whence the sounds had come. There was a form lying upon the bed of straw recalled by White, the form of a woman—De Braddock.

The silence that followed upon the outlaw chieftain's exclamation excited the alarm of Black Hank. He took a step forward.

"Why, the hell!" he shouted; "don't you answer?"

"Smoky," hurriedly whispered White, "there are only those we see, in all likelihood. Come on."

They dashed into the glittering place, where the magical burst of splendor and illumination arranged, as a possible courtesy to De, by Black Hank, during his period of waiting for the return of his lieutenant, now shed, from wall and roof of the rebel's home, showers of dazzling red, blue and violet rays. With a horrible and blood-curdling oath, the outlaw chieftain fired at his swiftly racing foes, invading, for the first time, the security of his lair. The report of his weapon crashed in a deafening explosion against the confines of the caverns and growled and thundered out in the mysterious regions of the hidden stream, echoing, in hollow repetitions, like the threatening sounds, flurry and din of victorious and besieging forces. Surprised and awed by the seemingly incredible discovery of his den the outlaw's aim had been uncertain, and, with the practice of the soldier, White returned the enemy's fire. Black Hank sank to the floor of the cavern, with a groan, mortally wounded. De screamed wildly, as she rose from the couch on which

she had been lying, and Rachel Bolers up started, like a sybil, to her feet. Specter-like she shrieked at the fallen outlaw chieftain.

"I told ye—I told ye, ye'd be sorry—ye'd suffer for it. I told ye," and, with eyes strained and staring at the prostrate form of the outcast, remained upright where she was.

"William!" was De's low exclamation, and De, for once, was resting upon the breast of William White.

Billings, silently examining the wounded leader of the outlaws, here spoke up.

"You've finished him, I reckon, Mr. White," he observed, quietly. Even as he looked, the outlaw leader gasped and expired.

This broke the tension of the moment. De modestly withdrew from White's embrace. Rachel Bolers was at the side of the fallen chieftain.

"Dead, dead," she wailed. "Hank, Hank, dearie,—an' he said he'd come back and ha'nt me.—But, no matter," she cried in almost the words the dead robber had used to White, on a former occasion, concerning herself, in that now very chamber of death,—“no matter what he was, or wasn't, he was brave an' true to them as served 'im.”

"Come, come, now, Rachel, do,—come, now," said Smoky Billings not unkindly to her, while he took her by the arm in a manner of friendliness and previous acquaintance;—"I s'pose it's hard on you, an' all that, missis,—but," and Smoky cleared his throat,—“what shall we do, Mr. White?" he said breaking off abruptly, and turning to White. "We got to git out o' here." He turned back to the grieving woman. "Some other time fer grievin', Rachel. Ye kin kum back in here to 'im," he added compassionately. "We can't bury 'im, now,—

the coroner'll have to see 'im fu'st," he said, again turning to White.

"Ye — no, no,— ye — ye musn't leave 'im here, all alone," and, testifying to the strength of some former unknown affection and cause of loyalty, the anguished woman threw herself upon the body of the dead, as if to hold it from desertion.

A secret thrill of awe, if not of reverence and respect, went through those assembled about the rough, wild scene. But Smoky Billings, once more, spoke up out of the silence broken only by Rachel's moans.

"Mr. White," he said, "they'll be over anxious 'bout Miss De. I'm sorry fur all this,—it can't be helped, sir, though, by paining of the livin' onnecessarily. Come — come, Rachel! — I think, sir, we ought to be a-goin'."

De had been deeply moved, by the tragic and unrestrained sorrow of Rachel Bolers; but, realizing the occasion of as speedily as possible quieting the doubts and fears of her own anxious parents, she turned, with an effort, from the painful sight before her, and said, with a sudden movement of the hand to her throat,

"Wait,—the locket, William, with your picture in it: I have lost it," and the girl went hastily to search the pallet of straw on which she had been lying.

The woman bending above the dead outlaw, swiftly, and with an alert movement as of an animal whose instinct had scented danger, raised her head.

"My God!" she cried; "the river 's risin'."

White sprang to the door of the cave. It was as Rachel said.

"What shall we do?" he ejaculated, in alarmed apprehension.

The water, from some unknown cause, had evidently risen in the subterranean stream without, and had al-

ready begun to enter the chamber and overflow the level of the rocky floor. The path, precarious, uncertain and dangerous at best, by which they had come, was completely covered, to a depth in places, and for a distance, covering gaps and fissures, now making it a matter of utter impossibility to return, without Rachel could help them to get back to the main entrance to the caverns.

"It can't be done—it can't be done," gasped the terror-stricken female associate of the freebooters, running up to William White. "You can't get through, that way. And the other way's not open, yet. Don't try it that way, Mr. White,—don't try it that way," cried the woman earnestly; "the current's like a millrace—you mustn't," she seemed possessed of the conviction that the writer was ready at once to dash into the outside reaches of the water, now collecting about their feet and, without guidance, plunge into the unknown terrors beyond.

It was only this that Rachel was saying, however, that White wished to know. With a cold impulse of despair, he turned back into the cavern. De, pale and calm, was at his elbow.

"Is there any hope?" she whispered between her white lips.

"Yes, yes, pretty little girl," Rachel Bolers attempted to assure her,—"yes, yes, there must be. Here, here," she said, as she became calmer, "this way," she quickly passed out of the view of those in the chamber and was heard, from behind a spur of rock whence she had disappeared at a far angle in the rear of the cave, calling loudly for her companions to follow.

Billings, who had stood in silence watching the actions of those about him in this last crisis of their affairs, was the first to obey the voice of the woman in her concealed place of hope and succor. Smoky's impulsive

starting forward was a cue for the rest, and he, followed by De and William White—the water now rising above the ankles—sought the spot from which Rachel's cries still issued. When White reached Rachel Bolers' side, he found her tearing at what, to him, appeared to be a solid wall of rock. Closer inspection, however, showed signs of crevices around a large space of the wall's surface

"There's a spring 'at works it, some'eres," she muttered,—“some'eres, hereabouts, Mr. White,” said the anxious creature.

"Can I help you, Rachel?" asked William.

"I never paid much 'tention to their doin'ses in this 'ere part uv the biz'ness, anyway; but it's here—must be," hoarsely moaned Nance's mother still wildly seeking the means of removing the stone.

The mysterious underground river had sought them out in their present more removed and even higher quarters and was whirling in circling eddies about their feet and limbs. Rachel, with a cry of delight, eagerly pressed a hidden spring, and the crevice-marked piece of wall sank slowly from view. "The machinery," she cried, and made a leap for a great iron lever or crank at the foot of a rude staircase discovered on the disappearance of the rocky panel. The terrified woman tugged and pulled frantically at this evidence of mechanical contrivance in the secret workings of the robbers' refuge; but seemingly to no avail, for she wailed in despair,

"No use! I thought so. The machinery 's out uv order." The panting creature paused in her efforts and gazed, with the look of some wild animal at bay, around upon her fellow prisoners anxiously and breathlessly gathered about her.

There was an instant of silence, and William White said with a desperate and resolved effort at calm,

“Rachel, do I understand you to mean that this cave can be flooded, by accident or design, to the roof?”

“It’s accident, dearie, it’s accident. The watergate has slipped down and cut off the flow out’ard uv the river. How high the water’ll rise, dearie, I don’t know. Up, up,” cried the woman, the flood beginning to swish her skirts, and urging her companions to ascend the rough stone stairway before them, ’up!”

In passing to their hope of escape, when Rachel Bolers had first called them, White, inspired by a last humane thought, took a farewell look at the still features of the outlaw captain. They left him lying, peacefully, where he had fallen from the soldier’s bullet. They went on up the rocky way hewn by the freebooters, in rugged steps, passing above the water creeping in cruel approach upon them. On, up, they went, Rachel leading. They soon arrived upon what seemed a final landing place to this staircase in the rock, going nowhere; for here the way ended abruptly. White looked from an opening in the wall that shut them in and gazed, as from a kind of balcony, down into the thrilling and half submerged chamber which they had just left.

“They,” said the woman of the cave, as she followed the glance that the writer had thrown to the water-covered floor of the apartment below, and hastily drew her own look back from the body of the dead outlaw leader floating in the rising current,—“they wuz a-goin’ ter finish this ’ere secret way uv escape, an’ never did.”

“I regret that they did not,” said White drily.

“Their plan wuz to flood the cave on their pursuers, ef they wuz follered in here,” further volunteered Rachel, humbly, in the reasonable supposition that her

hearers might feel interested in the full, though complex, designs of her old associates.

"Your friends were a precious lot of rascals, friend Rachel," quoth the literary man removing his gaze from a searching view of the limited space of rock by which they were immediately encompassed on the small landing where they stood and, once more, allowing it to rest upon the stern, set features of the dead robber chieftain, whose body was slowly wheeling around in the eddies below. "Billings," quietly remarked William, looking anxiously at De Braddock, "have you anything to offer?" resignation and hopelessness, the latter concealed, however, as far as possible from De, possessed him, as he spoke.

The underground stream had rapidly overflowed the lower portions of the cave until the waters released from all restraint had, by this time, reached a considerable and threatening depth. Smoky, in his turn, stared mechanically down upon the place from which they had but recently fled. His own eyes dwelt upon the pallid face of the now silent leader of the robbers of the caves where, in stubborn rivalry, the powerful surface currents and undertows fought for possession of the still bandit, as if they might have considered the senseless clay an indispensable asset in providing for their own rapacious appetites for prey.

"I don't know, sir," replied Billings with an appearance of hesitation, to White's previous inquiry; and fixing a look of concern upon their charge De Braddock. Smoky refused to confess to the fear he himself felt that they were never to get out of the caverns alive. He moved his gaze over the walls of the confined space in which they had taken refuge. Turning to Rachel Bolers he casually asked,

"You don't know where that leads to, do you?"

pointing, at the same time, to a short, narrow passage among the rocks, that extended, at right angles to the spot on which they stood, in seemingly a blind excursion into the impassable obstruction of their prison house: For the little defile apparently led nowhere, and came to a sudden and abrupt end in their sight.

Rachel answered promptly and with the same air of rational frankness and candor that had characterized her since the waters had shut them in.

"It wuz up thet a-way they wuz ter hev' carried the secret passage fur the escape," said Rachel Bolers with a hopeless shake of the head.

White, for some time, had been watching a small projection of stone which he had selected upon a section of wall in the larger cavern for the purpose of gauging the height to which the lost river might rise. The species of enclosed balcony on which they stood was no more than ten feet from the floor of the cavern. The water, White judged, had reached to the dangerous depth of several feet. It was still rising, but not so rapidly as before.

The end of the passage which Rachel had said was to have been used by the robbers to complete their avenue of escape, being plainly in sight and but a little distance off, when it appeared to occur abruptly at a huge boulder, attracted Billings' interest. He had allowed himself to conceive but a scant hope of an outlet, here, in view of the growing belief that Rachel Bolers could be relied upon for the truth of all she had imparted to them. He, therefore, quietly slipped away and entered the blind alley silently, lest hope, aroused without reason, be hopelessly disappointed.

"They will be looking for us out there," said White, and his voice was as that of one who had begun to speculate upon the outside world, from the depths of a living

tomb, and hollow in spite of himself. He looked quickly around, however, with a bright smile, to De to reassure her, and nodded hopefully and encouragingly to Rachel.

What hour of the night it had grown to be, at last, none could tell. Somewhere, in a mysterious chain of underground chambers, there must have been connected with their own cavern a reservoir for the overflow of the secret river; for the body of water had plainly ceased to rise.

There were rough projections of stone from floor and wall, where they that waited found rude seats; and here De and William sat, side by side, as the heavy and brooding night wore on.

They, these two, who had been so much to one another; whose lives had been so interwoven; between whom but one dividing interest had ever come,—they now waited, not in despair, but in the lofty resolve and resignation of souls committed to that which the universal decree, O yes! bears to all alike in divine kindness, merciful understanding of our common wants and in eternal peace, love, rest and joy.

It was De who finally spoke.

“We can die together,” said she. She was thinking of Simons and of that which was to her worse, far worse, than death itself — the hateful marriage understanding between them. She looked innocently and fearlessly into the eyes of the man at her side. “It would be easy, oh! so easy, to do so.”

There are times when, in the face of threatening and impending doom, the soul laid bare by its owner facing the issues of eternity may not be questioned in that owner’s act. De could not have more confidently confessed to William White the imperishable love she bore him. To the companion of her hour of trial, the expression of her heart was sacred; and he silently accepted the

meaning of her words. He delayed, in that moment of grave uncertainty to life, the revelation of that which he might have uttered in prejudice of the subject which he well knew was occupying his fellow prisoner's thoughts — Brad Simons. Were they not to escape, then might she as well never know the depth of Simons' infamy; did they, in the favor of fortune and providence, ever leave the caverns, alive, why then — well, then, they would —

"See," De whispered in awed tones to William White.

White followed the direction of her gaze and pointing finger.

The rough and broken arch forming the entrance to the cavernous chamber, where the angry flood swept back and forth, like the cavern's distant, vaulted roof, was lofty, and its top still remained far above the level of the water's reach. The strong, steady ebb and flow of Lost River was ever driving the dead outlaw in upon its inner flow and outward on its retreat. The mysteries of the beyond were growing impatient, and the living waters clamored and hungered to claim him. The brilliant, garish and dazzling lights, as yet untouched by the waters, sparkled and flashed, gleamed and glowed upon the face of the dead, where the great black beard of disguise still covered the features of one whose place in the world without had once been recognized of influence, dignity and importance. The evil flesh at rest — the staring and unseeing eyes fixed upon the flaming beacons in their still and silent owner's underworld brilliant and resplendent stronghold of crime — the lesson of the vanity of selfish greed, lawless cruelty and their cause drifted at the outlet of the cave, where the currents and the waters wrestled to bear it away to the interests of eternity. William White and De Braddock watched,

and the dead outlaw, with his cold face and sightless eyes agleam, went out with the flood.

"William?" once more whispered De.

"Best beloved?" responded her companion.

"Did the man do his duty?"

"The dead man?"

"The dead man."

"God help him!" fervently ejaculated the writer.

"William?"

"What is it, true heart?"

"If we are saved, I have a duty that may command my life. O remember now that, though I take upon myself other ties and self denials, I have loved those who would have sorely suffered had I forsaken them. Is that, William, duty — to comfort them that sorrow, ease them that cry in pain?"

"That," returned the man, "is life's first holy purpose."

"And, William,—"

"Yes —"

"— when we love and do our duty —?"

"It is the dawn of life immortal," replied her companion.

She must have slept; for, by and by, White gently touched her as she sat leaning against him, and she became conscious of Smoky Billings standing before them.

"Come," said Smoky with a look of cheering hope, "I have found something."

CHAPTER XLIII.

A GHOSTLY GUIDE.

They went with Billings. He had discovered that which Rachel did not know,—that the outlaws had already prepared the way for the removal of a massive rock at the end of the defile. A crowbar and pick lay in the little passage; and with these Smoky Billings had demonstrated, to his own satisfaction, his power to go on in the robbers' own direction of safety.

None were more eager than Rachel. She pressed forward, with the others, to discover, by the evidence of her own eyes, wherein she had made so vital — so interesting and important — a mistake.

“You see,” indicated Smoky to White, taking the latter to a slight opening at the side of the boulder, while De clung to William's arm, “out beyond, there, tho' it's dark, is open way uv some kind er other.”

By the united strength of William White and Smoky Billings the stone was rolled away and went thundering down into the unknown depths of a pit which lay just past the stone, in its rear. What seemed to be a perilous path led up at the brink of this cavity in the earth, until it lost itself in the uncertain darkness beyond.

Smoky Billings insisted upon going over the unexplored way, first. White finally consented; and Smoky, with a match case full of matches, set forth upon his uncertain and perilous journey. The small party of watchers saw him strike his first match; saw him go on till it had almost expired, and saw him light another.

All the way up that path, they watched, with breathless interest, the plucky and courageous fellow, as match after match flickered low, replenish his twinkling tapers and continue to ascend. After a while, they saw him turn and retrace his careful steps.

Unknown to even Rachel Bolers, the outlaws had already opened a way — baffling and mystifying in its nature, but still a way — out of the flooded territory of the caves. It was apparent to both White and Billings, that the brigands' secrets — some of them, at least — had been carefully guarded from the knowledge of even Rachel Bolers herself; who, with all her former seeming mental frailty, had been implicitly trusted in many responsible ways by Jason Jump and his fell and rapacious associates.

There is a shrewd surmise, as heretofore intimated, that the outlaw leader purposely gave her the opportunity, which may have resulted in her gaining possession of the compromising marriage agreement between Brad Simons and Mona Walker,—if Rachel at this time had really secured it,—in hidden revenge on the cattleman for refusing Jump's offer to sell Brad the uncomfortable and compromising document. Mona Walker's interests could have inspired the unfortunate man, as well. Jason Jump, as has before been hinted, was unable to foresee, if such were the case, to what dire events his own act favoring Rachel would lead.

But the discovery of further galleries and passages in this maze of underground chambers was little better, apparently, than a hollow mockery of the imprisoned captives' situation, in the seemingly hopeless confusion and unexplored condition of these obstacles in the way of deliverance from the dangers and menaces of their prison house. Still, to feel that they were not to meet death amid the sluggish, slimy waters below the rocky

baleony behind them was a relief beyond their hopes but a few moments since; for there could be no doubt that the cunning freebooters knew the way ahead to be safe from flood, at least.

They contrived to secure a lamp from the granitelike wall of the larger cavern where the article of underground illumination had been placed, by its original lawless owners, within reach from the landing on which the adventurers had stood. With this to light the dangers, terrors and obscurities of their unknown way, the begirt though stout hearted unfortunates set out to explore their forbidding and uninviting dungeons. They shuddered as they threaded the narrow foothold which, looking down into the black and seemingly bottomless abyss in the rear of the large boulder removed by William White and Smoky Billings, took them to a further small landing or platform of rock, where Smoky had before paused to return from his first trip of discovery.

There were many narrow passages leading in as many different directions, beyond the point whence Billings had returned; and which of these to take puzzled and added grave and anxious care to their progress. It was well enough known to White, of all those present, that human beings had, before their time, been lost — hopelessly lost — in the labyrinths of subterranean catacombs, and never come forth alive.

“Look — look!” screamed Rachel Bolers, suddenly, where she stood, facing the way they had come.

It was well the little band of explorers had found a safe resting place, for the startling and unearthly effect of the wild woman’s attitude and thrilling exelamation might, otherwise, have caused serious results at the brink of the pit, by the blood-curdling note her cry imparted to the uncanny and fearful surroundings. As it was, all turned to see the inhabitant of the eaves

standing so near the pit's black, yawning mouth that White, only restrained by apprehension of an ill-advised movement, on his part, being calculated to precipitate the object of it into the depths below, stood spellbound, with the rest, at what followed.

"Yes, yes," cried the wild and possessed woman, whose spiritual sight, heated by the events of the past, raised visions foul and fair, "I see ye, and I hear ye. Whut is it, Hank, dearie?—yes, yes. Ye waves yer arms—ye has a smile 'at's kind—yer wants ter he'p us?—I see, I see,—ye nods yer head,—ye'll he'p us,—ye nods yer head." White, following a gesture of her wildly entreating hand, could see she indicated the solitary, gloomy space above the center of the dark, gaping chasm in front of them. He looked,—he saw nothing. "Yes, yes, Hank, dear Hank, I'll do it,—I'll do it," continued Rachel. "Which one uv the passages is it?—Ye-e-es,—he's gone, but he told me," and she turned slowly to her companions and pointed simply to an opening in one of the several galleries stretching away before their views. "That one'll lead ye out," she said.—"He said he'd come back and ha'nt me, an' he done it,—but he wuz kind," she muttered to herself.

"But, Rachel,—" began William White, dubiously.

"Ye'd better go that way," was all they could get her to say.

White, seconded by Smoky Billings,—De remaining diffidently noncommittal,—passed over Rachel Bolers' spiritual directions, with what bordered on a touch of impatient and inconsequential consideration, and led the way, without more controversy, into a passage other than the one indicated by Rachel; and that seemed to offer, among the blind alleys leading in various paths from where they stood, as good a chance for escape from the caverns as any of its mates. They toiled on, in dis-

heartening silence, little room existing for more than one in advance of another, and, in such formation, hardly space in which to stand erect.

Rachel kept in the rear, being the last to proceed and continued to mutter her confidence in the reliability and correctness of her recently acquired supernatural knowledge.

After long and weary effort, during which it would have been impossible to tell how far they had progressed, De was the first to pause. Simultaneously Billings, who, with the lamp, had managed to work to some distance ahead of White—invariably appearing animated by a desire to place De Braddock's lover in as little risk as possible—came to a halt, and announced to those behind him, that the way was blocked for extending their search in that direction. De, who had been absorbed in thought since starting to explore the gallery they were then in, said quietly to William White,

“One, like Rachel, so long frequenting these regions, might have a guiding sense, if only a species of blind animal instinct,—that —”

“Tut, tut,” said White kindly.

They had turned and were, by this time, retracing their steps; and, after a dispiriting trial, again found themselves standing by the great pit.

Rachel now remained, to all appearances, an indifferent and uncommunicative spectator of the others' confusion and uncertainty.

“Guess better try Rachel's way,” at last said Smoky.

“Try it, William,” bravely suggested De. “Should it be wrong, we can come back again.”

Hesitatingly, at length, White proposed a trial of Rachel's selection, and they started to explore the passage she had pointed out.

This gallery was somewhat narrower at its mouth than the others; but wider and roomier, as the seekers for freedom went on, than the one they had previously been in. White came to a sudden halt, where the light which Billings carried fell upon some crude markings attracting attention upon the left hand wall.

Here, rudely carved in the rock, were several singular characters. An arrow appeared first, pointing straight ahead; then came a number of dashes; after this, a mark which closely inspected was made out to be a crude X or cross—beneath the cross were the words: “Press in.”

Over these irregular markings, William White, with a set, care-drawn face, puzzled deeply, for a moment.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE CAVERNS OF DAWN.

Uncle Peter Braddock, together with the strong force of neighbors whom he had enlisted in his search, saw the night advance, with an aching heart for mother, at home, and the most acute and anguished concern for the unknown fate of his beloved child. He and Bob Likkum, whose sympathetic and true hearted support and company the old farmer had all that awful night, had wandered away from their companions in brief and unsuccessful excursions resulting from occasional suggestions arising among the group of searchers; and had as often returned to continue unavailing and fruitless pursuit of their quest. It is doubtful whether or not any of those forming Peter's associates had knowledge of definite kind affecting the location of the cave-resorts of the outlaws, of that section of the country; none more than confessing, under their breath, to intimacy or familiarity with the existence itself of the dread band of malefactors. If the hunt for trace of the lost girl took the anxious seekers out of the more beaten tracks of the country ways, it was in a manner alone a chance prompting that caused such varying course to be adopted. However, Likkum, in a sort of knowing appreciation of the general detailed life of his locality, recalled the assault upon De, by the outlaw whom Smoky had thwarted; and discreetly though reluctantly suggested to old Braddock the possibility of the mystery of De's whereabouts falling in with a more extended disposition

of criminal purpose on the part of the miscreant. Bob, here, proposed, from his meager knowledge of the region of their haunts, to endeavor to discover something amidst the outlaws in their native fastnesses. Farmer Brad-dock, out of whose Hoosier blood had been left the meaning of fear or disloyalty, at once directed an immediate invasion of the robbers' territory, with Bob Likkum as guide.

It had transpired, at the time of Likkum's suggestion, that Uncle Peter's searching party was near a patch of high, rocky ground much feared and avoided in the country, by reason of the presence, here, of dreadful, mysterious and unsounded holes known to reach down into the unplumbed bowels of the earth. They skirted this raised mass of earth and stone and found themselves, unknowingly, close to where the body of Hen, the dead outlaw lieutenant, lay stretched out in his last rest, by the hand of Smoky Billings.

Back in the caves, where, so close to those seeking them, hail could have easily reached the ears of the searching party had those confined within the earth been above ground, the captives of flood and chance were poring anxiously and deeply over the mysterious signs on the rocky wall of the subterranean gallery. The roughly carved arrow pointing ahead of the dashes, the cross mark similarly and crudely cut in the stone, and beneath the cross the words, "Press in," at first, from the last phrase, naturally suggested the pressing in upon the section of rock on which the characters were inscribed. This was found, however, to result in nothing—the wall stood as firm as adamant against their united strength.

White knit his brows, while the others ranged about him in helpless quandary.

' Suddenly he cried out to Billings:

"Smoky, I have it. The arrow means to go on; the dashes—which, you see, are just fifteen—mean feet or paces—let's try both,—and the cross, *over* the words, 'Press in,' means 'cross over—press in,'—that is, 'Cross over to and press in upon the opposite wall.' Let's see if I am not right. We'll go forward, say,—try fifteen feet, first. Wait,—here is another sign or something. I make it out to be a word,—yes, it's the word 'Outlet,' is it not, De?"

The girl looked closely and confirmed White's decision.

"But," said her companion, "it appears to be much lower down than the rest," and he struck the rock, which, before, they had not done, having contented themselves with merely pressing in upon it. It certainly gave back a dull, hollow note. "Smoky," said White, a new idea seizing him and holding him back, "you go on, say fifteen feet, cross over to the opposite wall, and press in. I will remain here."

The diagram or chart appeared in the form of a puzzling and rough sort of rebus, something like the following:



By this time, the group gathered about the unexplained portion of stone was roused to the highest pitch of interest and excited anticipation.

Billings carefully counted off fifteen feet, crossed the

low, narrow passage or tunnel and tested the wall as directed, but without result.

"No use, Mr. White," he announced, examining thoroughly the rocky surface in front of him by light of the lamp he carried, and striking the wall with a small piece of stone taken from the floor. "It's solid, an' won't budge an inch."

White, who had waited hopefully, with the others, for a possible successful outcome of the trial, felt a touch of disappointment; but, remembering the distance to go from where he stood might be greater, instantly replied, in a cheerful voice, to reassure the others, "Try paces, Smoky,—fifteen *paces*."

So fifteen paces were measured off by Billings, and another attempt made, this time with more success,—the piece of wall pressed upon moved. And William White, intently scanning the section of wall, before which he remained standing, saw *it* move, likewise.

"Mr. White," called Billings, from his place at the further point in the gallery, "it won't go in, anymore—it's stopped—the rock's stopped, an' I can't pass through."

"Come back," called the writer, in return, though without explanation.

Smoky Billings rejoined the balance of his party. He found them before an opening in the rough, uneven rocky wall, a portion of the latter, which contained the roughly engraved symbols and words, having disappeared beneath the surface of hard, indurated earth and stone on which they all stood.

"The piece of rock you pressed on," said White, briefly, for the benefit of those with him, and speaking directly to Billings, "must be connected with my section, by rods running under the flooring," White expressively tapped the tightly packed dirt and rubble stone with his

foot, "and draws down the block of stone, at this point," indicating, with his hand, the dark opening in their sight.

The curious complexity and ingenuity of mechanism employed by the outlaws, at this remote stage of escape from possible pursuit, have been justly attributed as much to Jump's general aim, in the cunning and tireless play of his acute and extraordinary genius and mental powers, at a plan for the mystification and impressing of his criminal and romantic associates, as to anything else. It was necessary for the outlaw leader to hold to him these degenerates, by every means he could contrive. Nothing so satisfies the imagination and the fancy of the reckless and the lawless as wild and irregular achievement.

It now only remained for the imprisoned explorers to warily and cautiously enter upon an investigation of what lay beyond the newly revealed and mysterious doorway. William White struck a match, and, despite Billings' protests, was first to enter the gloomy chamber into which the entrance through the wall ushered them. Smoky followed, and De and Rachel brought up the rear. White's taper suddenly went out, ere Smoky Billings had gotten well inside the damp, mouldy apartment, and the former uttered an involuntary exclamation over the mishap. The writer's sailor associate, with the lamp, was quickly at the other's side, however, and the little band of adventurers found themselves, by its light, within a commodious and roomy apartment of the caverns.

"Look," cried De pointing to the center of the room,—"a table and food."

And sure enough the place of resort, in the robbers' adopted plan in face of unexpected invasion of their lair, was seen to be a well equipped point of possible siege and comfort.

Billings, scrutinizing the elevated inner roof of the cavern, made another interesting and, at this time, even more valuable discovery.

"There's yer 'Outlet,' " he remarked to William White, with a relieved gesture at the ceiling.

Near the center of the overhead rocky covering of the extensive and roomy cavity, was an irregular hole large enough to admit the entrance or exit of one person, at a time. Its lower edge presented an appearance of great depth from the world above, in the seemingly far-off glimpse they caught of the stars in the night sky, without; but the safe flooring of the place, the necessary supplies and the consciousness that they had found the outlaws' emergency exit from their weird and uncanny dens, filled the members of the gathering, in flight from deluge and death, with joy.

Their feelings of elevation and elation, however, were doomed to be quickly dissipated, for nowhere could be found any means that might have been employed by the freebooters for reaching the opening in the roof. Search as they would, there was no ladder—nothing to be discovered by which to ascend to that lofty height from the floor of their place of confinement. They might as well have been shut in a cell, bolted and barred, with no hope of ever removing the inflexible and impenetrable iron and steel of bars and bolts.

"Rachel, in a way, was right,—the miscreants had not finished their purposes," commented White; "or their designs are to forever remain beyond our knowledge and shrouded in mystery."

William White's observation—speculation—might indeed have but suggested the seeming eternal and unknowable ways of all evil, in the apparent baffling mystery of the universal plan and purpose of dark and devious methods, and shrouding life. I, myself, remem-

ber, once asking the chief of the bureau of detectives of the Metropolitan Police, of Washington, why a character, then under suspicion, had done something incidental to the subject of the main misdoing then under consideration,—something to all appearances out of all even criminal reason, and entirely devoid of any suggestion of a rational connection with the rest of the case. He replied, “God alone could answer the question; that a criminal was prone to do things there was no accounting for, on this earth.”

We are probably all similarly and equally gifted.

However, there is an explanation for the missing and essential provision of means by which the outlawed workers entered and left their cavern-refuge. The ascent to the roof was effected, by use of a rope ladder, and, after exit was thus accomplished, the ladder was drawn up and securely and secretly concealed in a place of hiding in the woods and rocks above. Thus the outcasts had carried on their operations in preparing the way beyond the first cavern. They had, of course, as yet, not completed their purposes, as evidenced, doubtless, in the unremoved stone, which Smoky Billings and William White had succeeded in displacing, at the balcony-defile, in the main cave. In fancied security or neglect the outlaws had left the roof-mouth of the cavern, where the captives now rested, open.

In his continued and absorbed interest in the uncertain prospect of their escape from the caves, White moved aimlessly and restlessly about their rocky place of confinement. As long, however, as they could see, if only far above them, evidence of the outside world in the glimpse afforded them of the night sky, without, through the hole in the distant roof, the problem of their ultimate rescue did not, for some reason, seem so hopeless to him.

De was, already, at the rude table, examining, with the foresight of a true housewife, the supply of provisions with which the outlaws had furnished their lair. Rachel was seated silent upon a roughly made bench. Billings was apparently lost in thought.

"What's this?" White was heard to suddenly exclaim.

They all turned, at the sound of his voice, to see him standing alone, in a remote corner of the cave, where, in a grotto-like recess, the writer had come unexpectedly upon an iron-bound, oaken chest.

His surprised announcement of the discovery brought the others to his side. The case was locked, and only with the greatest difficulty did they succeed in forcing it open. Using heavy stones and the cutlery from the outlaws' table upon the lock, and forcing the lid with a rusty hatchet found in the cave, the cover finally yielded.

White stepped back, with some papers from the box in his hands.

"The stolen bank funds and securities!" exclaimed the astonished finder.

Before their fascinated gaze lay the restored wealth of the little community, including William White's modest bank deposit. The mortgage on the literary aspirant's small farm had been foreclosed, and he had lost the home property; but he rejoiced none the less in the good fortune and glad tidings that this unlooked for discovery would bring to his friends and neighbors, in the outside world, if the lucky finders ever succeeded in getting out of their prison,—if they ever did!

If Rachel Bolers had possessed the stolen marriage agreement between Mona Walker and Brad Simons, which was not among the recovered articles, Jump, if through him she had secured it, must have, in some way, favored her previous possession of it; as the woman knew

nothing of this secret hiding place for the results of the bank robbery, prior to her entrance into it in company with William White and his companions.

Billings, standing directly beneath the opening in the roof above, suddenly and for no apparent reason raised a prolonged shout.

"What's that for?" inquired the literary man, looking as if he thought Smoky's recent experiences might have been too much for the faithful sailor.

"Signals uv distress," laconically rejoined the seafaring man.

They understood. All that was left for them to do was to make themselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit; and hope for some passing searcher or chance visitor to that region to hear their calls for help. The country round about was avoided as a pestilence was, by reason of its mystery and darksome pitfalls; and they felt a shock of uneasy apprehension concerning the fate of any who, confronting the additional danger of encounter with the remnant of the outlaw band, would have knowledge sufficient to lead them hither in exploring search of this treacherous and questionable locality. The chance that their own signals for help might bring the other freebooters down upon them or their hoped for rescuers had to be taken.

Life, at best, is, now and then, but chance.

And Smoky Billings shouted loud and long.

Peter Braddock, under the direction and guidance of Bob Likkum, and attended by the faithful little company of neighbors and friends who accompanied him in search for his missing daughter, made his way cautiously around the elevated mound of earth and stone which they had reached. Night was now far advanced. Their progress, by Likkum's advice and craft, was concealed, so far as could be, from any possible spying outposts of the

outlaws, should the freebooters' territory have been, at last, discovered.

"S-h-h," breathed Bob Likkum, guardedly. "Listen."

Something was moving, at a little distance away, among some trees.

At this instant, Braddock, in advance of his party, came to an abrupt halt, with a subdued exclamation on his own lips. His companions gathered around him. Before them lay the body of Hen, the dead outcast.

"There's bin trouble, here," said old Peter Braddock.

"Git behind cover," suddenly commanded Bob Likkum catching sight, on the instant, of figures skulking amidst the scattering growth of forest, in the pale, uncertain light of the newly risen moon.

Likkum's order was none too soon. The bullets whistled past them, as Uncle Peter's little band gained the shelter of some rocks.

Likkum, without more ado, opened fire, and a groan from the direction of his aim told that the shot had taken effect.

"I say, Bob," remonstrated old Braddock, "ye may be a-firin' on frien's. They may mistook us."

"Don't keer to be mistook that way" replied Likkum. "I seen the'r faces a-kivered up weth black rags, right and proper."

"Who be ye?" called Farmer Braddock.

"We'll d—n soon show you, if you don't quit this place," was the answer, from beyond Uncle Peter's ram-parts, in a loud, hoarse, brutal snarl.

"D'ye know anything 'bout my da'ter Delia Braddock?" shouted the farmer.

"You be—say, how'd ye like tuh find out!" derisively yelled back the spokesman of the evil and threaten-

ing group among the shadows of the trees in front of the party of searchers.

"Ef ye know anything 'bout my da'ter Delia Braddock," persisted Unele Peter, doughtily, "ye'd better make up yer minds, fur yer own sakes, ter tell, an' tell quick. We got th' sheriff here, an'—"

A volley of oaths, observations reflecting in anything but a complimentary sense upon the sheriff and a burst of mocking and sardonic laughter were launched, by Unele Peter's uncomfortable adversaries, in response to this earnest and resolute speech of the Hoosier father.

"Bob, did ye see how many uv 'em were ag'in' us?" asked Peter Braddock, in a low voice. The stout old Hoosier's blood was up, and he was ready for a sortie as any knight of old in castle walls.

"Not many," returned Bob Likkum.

"Zach," said Peter to Zach Stoner, the sheriff, whom chance presence in Braddock's neighborhood had made a member of the searching party, "now's yer chanst ter take the damn villains red-handed!"

"I'm ready, Peter," simply and grimly returned the fearless officer of the law.

"What d'ye say, Robert?" inquired Uncle Peter.

Now satisfied more than ever in a feeling that the fate of De Braddock was affected by if not in the actual keeping of the nameless spokesman of the miscreants and his lawless associates, Bob Likkum cautiously suggested a plan to Uncle Peter Braddock, looking to the immediate conquest and capture of the band of ruffians before them.

They were in the thiek of a patch of woods—the scattered and broken fringe of forest thereabout abounding. The members of both opposing forces had secured the safe protection of the trees and rocks; behind the sheltering cover of which the respective little armies, so to speak, rested upon their arms.

Likkum had placed himself behind a tree near Uncle Peter, who was similarly protected. Bob spoke low to Peter.

"You and me," whispered he, showing considerable native shrewdness, "'ull sneak, unbeknownst, aroun' behind 'em. Stampede 'em frum the rear. An', w'en they's all mixed up like, t'other of our fellers 'ull hit 'em a swipe from the front. See the idee?"

This plan was matured and completed by Likkum, carefully and unseen, by the outlaws, sinking flat upon his face to the earth and crawling silently and with equal success from one to the other of his companions; when, all having been duly acquainted with what was expected of them, Peter and Bob, by seeming to quietly withdraw, and by then making a wide detour, effected a position in the rear of the enemy.

A flood of caustic humor, on the part of Peter Braddock's party, supplied and directed from the front at the outlaws, provided additional diversion under cover of which Bob Likkum and Uncle Peter completed their clever maneuver.

"Yo'll shorely make a purty pictur' you will," sang out one of the party, the object of this pleasantry being the spokesman of the thieves, "when yo' hang by yer blame neck till ye can't git yer breath."

A jeering retort was hurled back, making up in vile coarseness lack of any and all other elements.

At the same instant the signal for attack upon the outlaws to be simultaneously made from front and rear—a shot beyond the outlaws' position—was heard.

"Come on, boys," Bob Likkum's quick, sharp, ringing shout cut the night.

With a sudden rush and wild yells, taking their lawless enemies in the confusion and panic of surprise, Bob Likkum, followed staunchly and unhesitatingly by the

others of the searching party, who promptly took up Likkum's blood thirsty and fiendish war cries, sprang over the rocks and through the trees that had sheltered him and Uncle Peter, and the entire assaulting force, firing and shouting as it ran, closed from front and rear in upon the threatening handful of outlawed fighters.

The unexpected and furious assault from the rear had its effect, and, in the wildest disorder, the robbers broke and fled.

Bob had felt a twinge in his arm, following a scattering fire from the trees on which they were advancing, and this proved the only casualty among those of the attacking party. The outlaws attempted to rally. Two fell dead. Three or four escaped, in wild flight, into the thicker body of adjacent forest, in their rear.

There was a moment of quiet in the noises and clamor of battle.

"What's that?" exclaimed Likkum.

A long, faint, indistinct cry came wailing out upon the air.

"It's someun' a-callin' fur help," said Peter Braddock.

The group of victorious men turned instantly in the direction whence the cry had seemed to come.

Once more, Smoky Billings' signal of distress, propelled by the sailor's powerful and experienced lungs, came drifting to them from the bowels of the earth.

Braddock, with the others, proceeded to make his way swiftly to the quarter in which he had been able to locate the sounds. He heard the call, again, and it brought them to the foot of the elevated heap of stone and soil where it was known deep cavities were to be found in the earth. Again, and clearer, came the shout. They were now upon the top of the mound, and from a forbidding looking well issued a cry:

"He-e-el-lo,—h-e-e-l-p!"

My God, Bob, they're below," gasped Peter Braddock, ashen white in the ghostly moonlight of the advanced night.

"It's Billing's voice," said Bob.

"Friends is at hand," shouted Uncle Peter, bending above the brink of the hole.

"Peter Braddock, is that you," roared Smoky Billings.

"It be."

"For Christ's sake git ropes."

"Be De there?" asked the old man, falteringly.

"Yes."

"Safe?"

"She is."

"Merciful God be blessed," tremblingly sobbed the farmer. "Smoky, I thank ye!"

It took time, and considerable of it, for one of the party of rescuers to go to the nearest point from which ropes could be obtained, and those above ground continued to cheer their imprisoned friends. A special messenger was, at once, despatched to relieve and inform Mother Braddock of De's safety.

"Likkum," White called up, apprised during the period of waiting of Bob's presence, "we'll be out in time for the convention."

"Jes' take yer solemn oath on it," rehailed Likkum.

"I've got a wounded arm, *weth* ye, William," shouted Bob good naturedly, rather tickled than otherwise at his hurt. "Hed a bresh *weth* th' outlaws a-comin' here, and they pinked my wing fer me."

"Nothing serious?" called White.

"Nope," returned the cheerful man; "on'y a scratch."

"Robert, ye go right to Mother,—she's pow'rful,

fixin' sich things," said Uncle Peter; and Likkum said he would.

Bob laughed so White could hear him and be cheered.

"Raehel Bolers 's here," Smoky shouted up.

"De," Uncle Peter called down, "let me hear yer voice, gal."

And De answered,

"All right, father."

The ropes finally arrived and were let down into the cave.

With great care Smoky Billings, below, sailor-wise directed the manner in which they were to be drawn up out of the cavern; and they were all, including Smoky himself, who came last, soon once more standing in the outer world, and in safety. Uncle Peter, haggard and careworn, received De in his arms with the exclamation,

"Thank God Almighty!"

While Bob Likkum and others stood by and wiped the tears away.

"De," exclaimed White, "it's morning!"

Day was breaking—the night was passed.

"Where, before jedgment, child, hev' ye bin—in what hole uv the earth?" said Uncle Peter, a ray of cheer breaking through the shadows of his eyes.

And De, answering her own question put to White, in the caves, "—when we love and do our duty?" and remembering William White's words, "It is the dawn of life immortal," cried, her face alight with the new birth of day faintly reddening the east,

"In the cavern of dawn!"

CHAPTER XLV.

“THE WRATH TO COME.”

The country took fire over the outrage which De Braddock had sustained,—figuratively speaking, blazed in one unrestrained conflagration of public, private and general indignation and wrath, that homes and firesides, life and liberty should be so violated and the organized causes of such unspeakable atrocities remain undestroyed. The flames of universal condemnation ignited society, and the irruption followed.

The leader of the outlaws, who was now familiar to all as Black Hank, had been borne away upon the mysterious underground waters; and was forever effaced, in material evidence, from the troubled and unhappy record; as Jason Jump, however, none, save Brad Simons, could identify the dead robber chieftain. Report, in the popular mind, from time to time, had continued, in a vague and elusive way, to connect the doings of the unknown leader of the outcasts, as with one who was said to have suffered some real or fancied grievance at the hands of existing government. The rumor, perhaps, had never been more than mere shadowy surmise or conjecture arising out of the circling eddies of spontaneous country gossip inspired by a word or a hint—a fragment of suggestion or what not—passing idly from mouth to mouth. Such comment in the midst of the primitive life of that rural though growing community,—starting from just what original source none could tell,—nevertheless, was enough to fix an idea of the hidden meaning of the

rebel bandit, in current understanding. But even so, to the general population the space between Black Hank and Jason Jump was a cipher; and while the disappearance of the ill used and disappointed government claimant, in the mournful tragedy of the miserable outlaw of the caverns, went direct to Bradford Simons' consciousness, to others the death of Hank was but a curious and uncomprehended coincidence with the singular dropping from sight of Grigsecomb's political manager and Simons' friend and associate.

As time passed and Jump no longer appeared amongst his followers, many surmises arose as to the cause of his disappearance. If, in moments of speculation, William White permitted himself, with Smoky Billings, to connect the outlawry of the robber chieftain with the character of the leader of the opposition to his own congressional fortunes, the territory between the outlaw and the well known citizen was too illusive and indefinite to secure profitable or practical conclusions. Notwithstanding, the problem of the lives of Black Hank and Jason Jump retained a firm and fixed place in the studious and conscientious mind of the political possibility and writer

After everything had been done to obtain trace of the missing man, further unavailing effort was finally abandoned; and Jason Jump took his place in the great chamber of oblivion and forgetfulness.

At this time, however, men and women,—even the children talked of nothing else,—men and women joined in unceasing discussion of the situation, in that locality.

It was, of course, rightly inferred that the death of two marauders,—Black Hank and his lieutenant, known as Hen,—together with the two killed in the skirmish led by Likkum, could not comprise the extinction of the entire band; and the ways and means were so unremitting-

ly and untiringly discussed and such steps grimly and relentlessly taken for the final elimination of the remaining miscreants, that sure promise of early relief from outlawry and crime dawned upon the burden-ridden land.

It may have been unfortunate for certain phases of William White's political interests that Jump passed, before White had been given more light upon the real issues and facts underlying the case of the manager of Grigscomb's campaign ; although the ex-soldier and literateur had now no reason to mistrust his own splendid and overwhelming popularity. In spite of his insistent efforts to have it understood that merit was due Smoky Billings for the successful and timely invasion of the robbers' den, the grateful and enthusiastic neighborhood was too rejoiced over the recovery of the bank's stolen valuables and their own wealth to permit any side tracking of William White's own credit for great services greatly performed. And thus it seemed impossible to stem a victorious and willing unanimity of selection, in the case of White, when a question of nomination and election should come about. Thus, upon the reflux, up from the vortex of events, was to be thrown the writer's triumph.

The convention, which was to nominate the standard bearer of William White's party, was late in the season, in its meeting. It so chanced, immediately following the day and night of De's abduction and rescue, that Mr. White's friends, headed by Robert Likkum, convened with the official gathering to select their candidate for congress ; and Brad Simons, now showing signs of the effect upon his nerves of the awful fate of his perverted companion and associate, had, with all the power and adroit skill which the unfair use of money gave, been long endeavoring to corrupt an opposition of sufficient

proportions to defeat White, in a convention of the latter's own party affiliation.

Grigseomb had been nominated upon the opposing ticket, for some time, and Simons, at last aroused by William White's popularity and evident strength, was using every means to procure the lawyer's election and secure the defeat and overthrow of the cattle dealer's rival—hated and detested not only in politics but equally despised and feared in affairs of the heart.

It unexpectedly looked, with this element of Brad's unscrupulous and determined stand unmasking itself to Likkum's watchful view, as if the nomination would be tied up in spite of the feeling, in the popular breast, of favor for the writer. Simons had, through widespread business connections in the primitive community, obliged influential members of his rival's party to take up, in opposition to White in his own ranks, a young man, by profession an attorney at law; and had attempted, with some success, to weaken the literary man with a practical element, by reviving the prejudice to what Simons called, “White's flimsy, visionary and impractical calling”—“that,” as Brad Simons pointedly put it to those early and unimaginative tillers of the ground, “of a moonshine maker,—verses! what are they? He'll disgrace you before the country and the world. What has he done for the community, besides accidentally finding some lost property?”

This was enough to put Likkum at his best. The little time spent, by Bob, with the young legal light whom Brad had filled with visions of future national greatness, will long be remembered.

“You're a-goin’,” said Robert, as he entered the young barrister's simple, one-room office, at T——, and walked abruptly up to the astonished aspirant for political preferment,—“ye're a-goin’, Claw-Hammer, it is

pop'larly understood," bluntly went on the visitor without unnecessary ceremonials, "to jump at a leap—at one grand, shiverin', circus leap—to the position—the honorable position," the redoubtable Likkum dwelling, with flattering sarcasm, upon the last phrase, "of leader of yer party, and," added Bob, appreciatively, "of lovin' bed-feller tuh Brad Simons. Ye're a helluvafeller, Claw, but do you think ye're Ben Harrison er Dan Voor-hees? Jes' wait—yer time'll kum. Can't ye hev' ez much patience ez a printer?"

Bob's address, directed at the disloyal object of it, employed with great relish and emphasis the singular, dignified and expressive name of "Claw Hammer," and Likkum, in skilful and effective ridicule, used no other; nor, as a matter of fact, gave the surprised attorney thereafter any title, whatsoever. The instrument of Simons' now unprovoked and wholly unexpected move against William White, during a limited sojourn in the locality of his law practice, had, by reason of certain affectations relating, in dress, to the indiscriminate use of a "swallow-tail" coat, obtained the appellation Bob Likkum had bestowed upon him, as well as created.

"Mr. Likkum," said the startled and irate member of the bar, "may I ask you to explain yourself?"

"If the boys git a-hold of you, outside, there," retorted Bob, jerking a thumb toward the window, "ye'll find precious little uv yerself left to explain to."

The other made an effort to show increased offense; but, watching Likkum, saw it was useless.

"But, Mr. White is visionary in his poetic views of self-sacrifice, unselfishness and all that nonsense and sentimental rubbish," replied the professional man, dropping all further attempt to appear dignifiedly unconscious of the object of Likkum's visit.

“Did Simons fill ye up weth that pap?” queried Robert quizzingly.

“Mr. Likkum,—”

“Named Bob,” broke in White’s political captain, seeing opportunity of effecting a return to the more familiar and neighborly intercourse. In his own recollection Robert had never been called anything other than Bob, by his young friend.

“—I am at a loss to account for such expressions.”

“Air ye!—D’ye reelly think Brad cares a whoop whether White writes po’try, er not?” asked Likkum.

“We should have a representative in congress familiar with the practical workings of the law,” glibly rehearsed the member of the bar.

“Did ye know that Simons wuz doin’ this only to git even weth Billy, ’cause the cuss is jealous uv White, ’bout De Braddock?”

“Bosh!” exclaimed the other.

Bob Likkum was as resolute in his determination to let nothing interfere with the successful nomination of his man, as his present companion was to maintain the position in which Brad, inspired by all evil aims, had succeeded in placing him.

“Thet’s yer idee, is it?” retaliated White’s unflinching advocate. “Well, it may be bosh, but yer’ll find a bushel uv bosh to yer peck uv bad apples. Now see here, young man: we got to bruise the bark to make a whistle. I don’t want ter be hard weth ye, but ye b’long to us,—why can’t ye be sensible, ye mortal, ye?”

Ambition had planted its serpent-fangs in the unwary and inexperienced counselor at law; and he squirmed in another and poorly affected attempt at offense, assumed to be taken from Likkum’s but half concealed depreciation of the lawyer’s importance.

“Did ye know,” asked Bob, insinuatingly, “that Cy

Saunders hez a lawsuit involvin' a rich mine out in the west, some'eres?"

Brad Simons, it seems was not the only one possessing the powers of business persuasion, as will be seen by Bob Likkum's prompt and effective methods as a manager of his friend's interests before the nominating convention.

The lawyer did not know of any such legal proceedings.

"*I know,*" observed the other's shrewd and skilful manipulator who had, undoubtedly, been cannily in the confidences of Saunders, the lucky gold-miner, whose lawsuit was genuine.

The aspiring political bee, in the bonnet of the rustic congressional beginner, ceased plainly, for a moment, its aggravating buzzing. The greedy young attorney sniffed the bait.

"What of it?" he said hesitatingly, at last.

"Oh, nawthin'," rejoined Bob, indifferently.

"Now, see here,—" began the other.

"Ye wouldn't, uv course, like to hev' the thousand dollar fee, in the case?" added Bob Likkum, rubbing his arm gently where the outlaws had "winged" him, the night before; and half turning, as if he had given up the object of his present visit, and was about to depart.

"Wait—wait, Bob," ejaculated the lawyer, affectation and pretense vanishing; "I don't know about that. Has Saunders need of counsel,—really?"

Robert had artfully withdrawn the linchpin securing the wheel of his opponent's previous inconvenient and biased argument, and the latter ceased suddenly in its interfering revolutions.

"He has 'reelly,' and a thousand dollars wuth, besides," said Likkum easily, but not yet refacing the fish that was playing with Bob's tempting decoy.

“Hum!” said the eager lawyer, clearing his throat vigorously, “a thousand dollars, eh?” and his glance meeting that of the convention leader’s, at the instant, showed the barest flicker of “game” understanding.

“Ye precious young reskel, ye,” good naturedly cried Robert clapping the young man on the back, “do ye want it?”

“What, Bob,—which—the fee?”

“Yes.”

“I think I’ll take the ease.”

The convention had met. Brad Simons had slipped in, at the rear, where standing inconspicuously among the profuse and general country audience come to see something—anything of interest, he watched unnoticed the success of his experiment. The delegates were called to order.

Likkum was temporary chairman. He rose and impressively addressed the assemblage; when, after the confusion of organization had subsided, Bob was assigned the office of placing his friend William White in nomination.

Robert Likkum rose literally and figuratively to the occasion.

“We are here,” forcibly began the speaker, “to nomynate one into whose hands can be placed, with certainty of success, the objects of good gov’ment,” he paused with due weight; “and pu’sonally and politically, neighbors, friends and feller citizens, I quiver with no doubt, nur am I swayed weth no appurhension fur the result.

“Thuh kentry,” swiftly the determined and enthused speaker went on, “needs lots uv Billy Whites. Fur why? Bee’us,” emphasised the orator,—“bee’us” this here mán White is honest-meanin’. He’s sincere,” cried Bob loudly, noting, as he did so, the darkling coun-

tenance of Brad Simons, peering above the throng in the rear of the hall. ("You bet he is," shouted a voice from the body of the crowd.) "—sincere—honest," persisted Bob Likkum. ("Yes, yes," came volleying from the gathering.) "I say," announced White's devoted advocate, easily and appreciatively sweeping his audience, with an experienced view, and thinking he perceived that popular division of time known as "the psychological moment," "I see this ain't no time fur me tuh waste words; an', ez the feller sez who tuk the hog, 'Le's git at the meat.' I am here fur to speak—fur to speak fur a great an' pop'lar candidate,—one who's loved an' respected—one 'at's tried an' true,—one 'at 'll serve ye well. Fur congruss I nominate the finished scholard, the good soldier, the gallant champeen uv virtue and the honored and beloved savior uv th' wealth uv this 'ere community,—Mr. William White."

Cheers and thunders of applause greeted Robert Likkum's really able and skilfully aimed appeal, as the modest and unlettered orator took his seat.

Simons was craning his neck, for, at this point, he expected a carefully prepared maneuver to be executed, when his young subsidized tool would be presented by a purchased speaker from White's own ranks, for nomination. His way failed. There arose, from among those in a thickly filled part of the hall the slender figure of the young barrister, upon whom the political, cattle-trading craftsman had fixed to accomplish his designing and underhand purposes.

"My business engagements," announced the lawyer, clearly, "are such as to preclude my permitting my own name to go before the convention. I move to make Mr. White's nomination unanimous."

Although this motion was out of order, no final previous action having been reached, Bob Likkum at once

led off with White's supporters cheering wildly and uncontrollably; the gathering broke loose and, in the end, the nomination of William White was made without a dissenting voice.

The victorious candidate, forced to rise before the assembled delegates and visitors present, got upon his feet and opened his mouth to speak. The din amounted to distraction. They dragged him from the platform; when he was hustled back, as a cask buffeted one way and another by the friendly inflow and outflow of a bounding, noisy surf breaking upon a hospitable shore.

“Gentlemen of the convention,” finally shouted White, on his feet, once more, in the center of the platform, “I thank you. I accept. Listen,” he called, in an attempt to hold the irrepressible spirits of the throng, —“I shall stand for law—”

“We know ye will,” yelled someone, in the crowd.

“—and order,” continued the candidate, still announcing the principles of his future course in politics.

“Ye ain't a-gittin' much of it,” shouted another.

“Money for many—tax for all the people; rich and poor justly given benefit of tariff.”

The clamor silenced him.

Presently,

“And you all know the rest about me,” the nominee went on. “I am for good faith and human fairness. I shall not, if I can help it, say one thing or mean or do another. If I have to tell others that I will do anything for them, I will try and do what I say I will,—I will not promise things I cannot fulfill.”

Again the spontaneous and excited uproar arose. This time, the orator was taken bodily from the speaker's stand, by the enthusiastic occupants of the hall.

Brad Simons slunk away; and William White, grasping firmly, with his single hand, the man beneath his one

arm, held on while two, one on either side, despite the soldier's laughing protestations, hoisted him and carried him upon their brawny shoulders past the delegates; past the shouting, yelling populace, standing aside; past De, whose glorified countenance shone like the sun amidst the home folks, and an inspiring glimpse of which White caught as he was borne along, and out of the building and past Simons, crafty, deceitful, scowling and shorn of all but the glowering and tragic shade of Jason Jump.

CHAPTER XLVI.

*BOB LIKKUM'S THEATRICAL "ANGEL."

When John Braddock was acquitted of the charge of the murder of Zeke Smithin, he remained, at Bob Likkum's earnest solicitation, for a night, in T——. The note, in the sum which Tom Bolers had forged on Simons, was still, of course, unsatisfied. Brad, upon the discovery of the robbery of Smithin, had been compelled to turn the money (taken by Tom Bolers from Zeke's dead body and by Tom transferred to John Braddock) over to the proper authorities.

Bob Likkum was with John, in John's room at the hotel. Resting in a comfortable rocking chair, with eyes half shut and head reclining against the chair back, he was relishing a very large, very fat and very black cigar, tilted at an angle of forty-five degrees and protruding from his closed lips. Bob was enjoying, in an ecstasy of quiet satisfaction, the half seen spectacle of the smoke from this triumph of the tobacconist's art curl, uncurl, circle in rings and finally dissolve like a panorama of life and roll away in space. Robert was well pleased with himself. He had just quitted a friend who had assented to a proposition of Robert's, looking to the solution of a vexed heart-problem. Likkum would puff complacently at the "fat weed," and then thoughtfully blow away the "congregation of vapors" about him. He regarded,

* When a company of players is in need of funds and secures a financial backer, it is said to have found an "angel."

with immense approval, as it hung upon the adjoining wall, a picture representing an extremely bloated-looking ship, which, under the disability of a part of a mast, hung in critical suspense upon the bulky crest of a huge blue-black-green wave. This latter uprising of the waters took broad and expansive splotches of red and yellow from a bewildering display of color in the lowering heavens overhead and thought to be lightning. The masterpiece, at times, so fascinated and dazzled Bob that, at such moments, he removed his cigar and, blowing a large cloud of smoke, whistled softly in the extreme of his admiration. It was just after an unusually prolonged whistle that Bob permitted his cigar, retired from duty in his mouth, to remain negligently between the thumb and finger of his right hand, which he waved unassumingly in John's direction as he remarked,

"Say, Johnny," Bob, in a confidential mood, grew a shade more familiar than usual, "that thare feller w'at they tried, that time, tuh lynch fur this Zeke Smith-in biz'ness, 's a gun, you know it?—saved old Cy."

John Braddock, rightly apprehending Bob's meaning to be in the direction of a word of praise for Smoky Billings, and having heard of the rescue of Cy Saunders, readily acquiesced in Likkum's statement.

"Yessir," said Bob, in unaccountable digression, "I b'lieve in a man allus a-standin' by his friends." As Smoky Billings had never seen the father of Job and Ann Mariah before the night of the rescue, the last remark of the genial Likkum certainly appeared to have no particular application, whatever.

John Braddock looked absently out of the window at the lights in the village stores across the way, and was silent.

"Johnny," said Bob, once more, after some moments spent in contemplating, for the last time, the marine

wonder on the wall of John's room, and it was noticeable that Robert Likkum's tone was growing to be one of an extremely kind and affectionate nature, "yer pap's purt'y hard up, ain't he?"

John readily admitted that both his father and himself were financially much embarrassed.

"Yes," said Bob soberly, and drawing out his words with a seemingly unnatural relish of his friend's awkward financial condition, "I know ye—both of ye—be pow'rful hard up; an' no wonder, 'ith all this 'ere trouble of yourn. Now, then, Johnny," pursued Bob Likkum, "I'd like almighty well ter see yer thro'."

"Oh, I know that," cheerfully assented John Braddock.

"See here," interrupted Bob Likkum, with judicial sternness, and eying his man formally, "they ain't no call fur ye to talk—not a bit—you jes' let me do this here talkin'. I'm a pore man, ye might say, when 't comes to doin' anythin' big, finansherly, an' that's th' fack—like 'tis 'ith a hull sight uv us; but I'll tell ye whut," and here Bob raised his voice: "they is others, 'at hev' got more'n me."

As though this had been an artfully preconcerted signal, John's door opened and an individual, combining many jovial good natured traits alike of personal appearance and voice and manner, with a perpetual squint of kindly humor in his left eye, walked in. -

"Come in, Cy, come in,—nothing private," said John Braddock unsuspectingly and cordially.

"An'," continued Likkum, as though no interruption had occurred "there's the man."

"What man, Bob?" asked John looking, in a puzzled way, from Cy Saunders' good humored, twinkling face to that of Bob, which preserved scarcely less smiling characteristics.

"We," said Robert Likkum, who had had several conferences with the fabled Saunders since the latter's return from the flooded river, or California, or whence-soever he might really be said to hail from, "are a-goin' ter see this here theayter piece end right and proper."

"See here, you don't mean—" began John Braddock, who had already been made aware, with the rest of those of that locality, of Saunders' reputed riches.

When Bob Likkum interrupted him with,

"Yes, but I do. Cy, here, is thuh angel uv this here actin' show-troop; th' geeenie," went on the benevolent and helpful Bob, drawing on his lore and figurative speech to the utter confusion of any connected or lucid arrangement of rhetoric, "uv this here present lamp; the fa-bled Creesus, which is a-goin' tuh pull you and old Peter Braddock and yer family 'an' all 'at in them is," "concluded the glowing and rustie philanthropist with a skilful application of part of the Fourth Commandment, "through this here i-dential bad times "

John's eyes filled with tears; but it was true, notwithstanding, and no insurmountable difficulty was encountered in the way of those ample and benevolent plans, hit upon by Cy and Bob for John's relief, being, at length, adjusted and settled to the satisfaction of all concerned.

In this generous and, it may be added, unexpected manner, John Braddock's inconvenient and unpleasant debt to Brad Simons in the interest of Tom Bolers,—together with the other perplexing and disheartening financial difficulties imposed upon De's brother and her father, too, by the unusual expenses of John's troubles,—was provided for, and at least one of Brad's tightening and tenacious tentacles released.

CHAPTER XLVII.

SMOKY BILLINGS OBJECTS—OBJECTION NOT OVERRULED.

It was evening, and De stood alone at her gate. Oh, that her agreement with the hateful cattleman was forever canceled! What could she do? She had promised Simons; and her word was sacred.

Of course, Brad, as was usual with him in the operations of his crafty and treacherous villainy, had been far too cunning, in any way, to leave, for De's present enlightenment or warning, either trace of himself or of his ultimate purpose, in the action with which he had inspired the ruffianly abduction of Uncle Peter's daughter. What his final intention was—whether to terrorize, even spirit the girl away to some distant locality, or something nameless and worse, may never be known. Simons, in the wildness of his disordered passions, had courted certain exposure, destruction and ruin, unless the concluding object of his act had been the lasting concealment of his deeds, by the continued restraint of his victim within the precincts of the caverns,—if, in very truth and evil destiny, it had not been meant that De should never come forth alive. As it was, his baser designs, whatever they were to be, had been frustrated by the agency and death of the freebooter Hen; who, when shot near the mouth of the cave, was on his way to Brad Simons with a token taken from the person of De Braddock, by Black Hank. This token was the handkerchief found by Smoky Billings.

Although unconscious of Simons' latest villainy, De, nevertheless, only too well knew that the cattleman would seek her at the earliest opportunity; when he would demand compliance with her part of their contract or understanding. Glancing down the road, she was not surprised to see the subject of her present thoughts, Brad Simons himself, approaching, mounted upon his familiar bay horse. He had come to brave it through.

Much weighing of what William White had said, before her leaving for home on the evening after John's trial, had occupied her constant thoughts. The sense of recent danger shared likewise filled the soul of the impressionable and true hearted girl with a flood of tenderness for her old lover; and her long established faith in all that he had ever been to her made his utterances to sway and influence the decisions of her mind despite all sense of real or fancied obligation to Simons. As Brad came on, she waited to hear what he had to say; but she, also, waited in a prudently reserved frame of mind and in judgment suspended. And, with it all, she must keep faith!

Simons was full of sympathy. He had just heard of the outrage. The long tolerated band of thieves and evildoers that had disgraced the community should be hunted down; and, in this last dastardly attempt upon his affianced wife,—De shuddered,—find their downfall.

"Of course, De," leisurely said Brad Simons dismounting, tying his horse, idly breaking in with comments upon the weather, and finally advancing, with easy assurance, into the yard and close to the side of the already shrinking girl,—“of course, you can readily understand how hard it is for me to wait.”

“Oh, Mr. Simons,” began the distressed subject of the cattleman's toils, “I—”

“Surely, you do not mean that you have forgotten so soon the escape and acquittal of your brother?” said Simons persuasively.

“But,—but it is so soon,” cried the girl vainly clutching at straws as they sped by, and remembering her promise to William White to hold this man off for a time.

“Is that all?” and Brad’s eyes began to glow with unholy light. “De,—” he put forth his hand.

“Don’t—don’t—don’t—touch—me,” faltered the other, in a state of despair.

“But I love you,” broke forth the man,—“I love you. Do you know what it is to love as I love, and, then, be trifled with?” he here leant over and the rush of his hot breath burned her cheek.

De, with an effort, mastered herself. She turned on her tormentor.

“You have little conception of love, Mr. Simons, if you call selfish disregard of the feelings of others such. You speak of love—do you know,” rapidly continued the girl, “what it is to love; to forget self; to live for another only for that other’s happiness; to have no thought of self beyond the joy it gives the object of your love. You love!” exclaimed the distracted and spirited girl; “you know nothing of love.”

“This to me, after—after what I have done for your brother?” said Simons gazing angrily at his companion.

It did seem severe, but to De it had not appeared more than White’s caution and warning had warranted.

“I cannot talk to you, to-night,” was De’s scarcely audible reply.

“You can talk to me, to-night, and you shall,” said the cattle buyer setting his teeth.

“Now, there, I never see the likes o’ such a man,—allus a-pipin’ fur these here poor, humble services—on

yer own watch, too," observed a slow, monotonous voice, with every indication of constitutional and incurable lack of interest in all things. "Mr. Smoky Billings, ee-squire," continued the voice as in a form of introduction of its user to such present as might affect so desirable an acquaintance, "allus at yer service," and the foiler of Simons suddenly withdrew a cloth from the farm lantern which he carried, in the first shades of the night, displaying Smoky Billings' genial, stubby-bearded countenance. "And, now," said Smoky, "we'll jes' stop this here bluff o' yourn, an' end this biz'ness, 'finally and f'rever,' as the feller says."

Brad Simons gazed speechlessly at the calm and serene face of the man before him; and broke out, at length, in his painful and suffocating wrath with extreme difficulty.

"You—you—low hound," he cried.

"See here, I ain't yer housekeeper, 'at yer kin talk so perlite to me," observed the easy-going being with the lantern. "Guv'nur, don't try an' keep this here game up, any more. Yer can't sail, any longer, under ther black flag, in these here waters.—Yer ain't no claim to that 'ere lady, an' you knows it."

"You lie!" said Brad Simons.

"Them sentiments o' yourn is very genteel and elegant," replied the undisturbed Smoky, "but what about this here dockymment?" quietly added Billings, quickly putting into the possession of De a paper, and flashing the lantern light full upon it.

Simons catching a glimpse of the contents of the sheet of writing which De held made a dash at it.

"Not quite so rapid," coolly interposed Billings, "th' lady has first chance," and Smoky drew Simons back with no gentle hand.

De gave a swift glance at the paper.

"Mr. Simons," said the girl in tones of burning contempt, "this is a written agreement, on your part, to marry your housekeeper Mona Walker," and De turned her blazing eyes upon the confounded schemer.

"You have been meddling with—it's false," cried Simons checking himself in the beginning of a torrent of frenzied and compromising utterances to Smoky Billings.

Simons fiercely turned on De.

"You are trying to break faith with me," stormed the cattleman to the girl,—“you,” he made a spring to De's side—“you are mine and I will have you.”

"Not this evening," composedly said Smoky, adroitly getting a leg behind Simons, and, with an accompanying shove of his strong arm, sending the stock raiser sprawling upon his back; where he lay, in a vain attempt to rise, with his feet aimlessly kicking in the air, as Unele Peter, with mother in the rear, appeared at the door exclaiming,

"What's the matter?" echoed by Esau coming from the barnyard.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE HARVEST MOON.

Our story has drawn within its embrace no personage of greater or more meritorious consequence, than that picturesque, wandering, haphazard and Gypsy-like character who has become fixed in the attention of the reader under the curious appellation of Smoky Billings.

The real name of this ex-sailor and knight of the road has never been known; and no record stands to prove that Smoky could have ever earned greater laurels under any other title of a former state of existence.

As anticipated by Simons, Rachel Bolers had succeeded in securing possession of the marriage agreement. How she had contrived to do so, it scarcely matters for the purpose of this story; though, doubtless, the act was accomplished through favor of Jump. Actuated by her undying hatred of De's persecutor, a hatred that had the abuse of her own offspring as a foundation, Rachel had taken the agreement to Mona; who, in the full knowledge now of Brad Simons' faithlessness, at once agreed to the use of the compromising evidence for the defeat of the unworthy intentions of the debased cattleman. Smoky Billings had secured the paper on the night of the rescue of Cy Saunders from the flood.

From the day when, a tramp straying on the roads and in the highways and byways of the Hoosier state, the devoted sailor was pounced upon by a mob and saved by De Braddock, to that when, after the most unyielding,

ceaseless and tireless efforts, he had uncarthed the means of her liberation from the dread toils of Brad Simons, Smoky was De's sworn knight and faithful defender. Smoky Billings, as we shall continue in honor and fame to call him, had no soul, no heart, no one single thought but of love and adoration for De Braddock. She was to him a goddess set afar upon her own bright pedestal; and one for whom it would, at any time, have been to Smoky a joy to freely, gladly die. The worship of his divinity partook of no earthly character of the flesh. It was as if a spirit of rare and surpassing beauty and excellence had descended upon his vision and, from the moment of first sight, had enthralled his spirit, and made of it a slave, faithful, adoring, loving, worshiping forever. And even after he had so signally aided in the crushing defeat of Brad Simons, in the latter's designs upon the worthy mariner's divinity, Smoky Billings made of De a final and triumphant issue, in that community, for the attainment of the highest aims of which he was capable of conceiving.

And now flickering uncertainly in the light of coming events the shadows weary are nearly at rest.

The parson was coming down the road one evening. The harvest moon silvered the parson's high, straight, black beaver, and crept around under the narrow, flat brim of the same, and caught his face at the edge of the shadow cast by the brim, and ran down his nose with loving brightness, and silvered his smoothly shaven face and chin and, then, proceeded to envelope him, from head to foot, in a mantle of silvern sheen. He rode on, as a parson should; for, he was going to make one of a number of invited guests to gather at the house of Peter Braddock. He clucked to his sorrel, and said "Geddup;" and the sorrel, paying no attention, continued in the same slow and unbroken gait that, with the parson as

rider, had marked the ways of the parson's steed since Woods had been known to travel those roads. And with him rode Mona Walker close to his side. And while the minister is drawing to Martha Braddock's "evenin'," here and there upon the various highways, appear other figures bound for the same genial and hospitable occasion. Like the Wise Men of old, they come, in their several ways, to meet at the Star of Martha. We see the democrat and roan, and Bob Likkum and Ann Mariah, with all the color of the universal laboratory of the rose dyeing that fair damsel's cheek, for a feeling is, at last, hers that the hour has come, and all beneath the harvest moon! And, here, too, the roads show approaching, all converging to dear and kindly Mother Braddock's, many other wayfarers—the shining countenance of Job Saunders, whom his father has set up on a farm of the former's own; and the similarly beaming features of the Widow Walmsey, whose amazing corn-colored silk, flowered in Indian red, scarcely bedims the dazzling glories of Job's highly fashionable splendors of attire,—the bell crown hat, at last, rests in revered and honorable retirement in the garret; and here is Cy—Cy Saunders, himself, the returned—the lucky gold miner and John's friend—he is just drawing up to the gate, where Uncle Peter stands and shouts, "Hello!" till you could hear him at Chicago; and Hiram Braddock is on hand, quite well again; John and his wife and little Nanny,—who has a new doll, the gift of "Aunt De,"—have come up for a sight of "the old folks at home;" and Rachel Bolders, too! and here is the figure of Author White, coming up the road, and following closely behind is another—his faithful friend and ardent admirer, Smoky Billings. And the harvest moon winks jovially (for has not that harvest moon reserved its most effective and artful snares and arrangements for later hours, and knows its own

pecially appointed time!) ; and, at last, a very fat farmboy enters Mother Braddock's parlor, making an effort to effect a way for one other who keeps dutifully in line in the fat farmboy's rear—Esau has a captive to his bow and spear—the throng of invited guests open right and left, and down the lane of wondering faces moves, with dignified and easy tread, the fat farmboy, with—no?—yes!—well,—with a fat farmgirl coquetting and blushing and making coy attempts at that ease and grace only befitting a hitherto unknown fat farmgirl out for the first time in the knowledge of man or woman with her young man; for none had ever seen the farmboy's partner before. And so was Esau's unusual state of excited and blissful exaltation, manifested at irregular periods of late, accounted for.

And the singing and dancing, and the apples and the cider, and cake of De's own special brand! In story-telling, Cy Saunders made Bob Likkum a close second—though in possibly a more thrilling and exciting vein; and told stories of Indians, and lonely prairies, and grizzly bears, and fights with wild animals and human ones scarcely less wild,—and carried on until the men admired, and made no attempt to conceal it, and the women gave vent to innumerable "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" and stifled little screams and cries of affected and terrified surprise, and Esau, sitting by the fat farmgirl, was seen to place a secure and protecting arm around a farreaching waist trembling and quaking in feminine anxiety and distress like some vast bowl of jelly in its highly wrought reception of these awesome tales.

"Gentlemen and ladies," said Robert Likkum, rising in his most formal manner and affording his audience a last opportunity, in the present narrative, of listening to one of his very finest and most celebrated deliveries,

"a-mong the most promynent and important of sich things as have occurred, we are happy, in the langwidge of the noospaper editorial writer, to a-nounce the recent and bril-li-unt-ly successful ree-ception," Bob flourished grandly upon these last words, "of the splendid story writin'," with a sense of making up for once unfavorably criticising the same, "of our disting'ished and renown-ed," again preening the very finest of his oratorical plumage, "naybor, friend and brother," this latter word appealing to Robert's fancy as containing the essence of something particularly fraternal, "Mr. William White, now pree-sent," and Bob waved a graceful recognition of William's "pree-sence" in the midst of the company, "whose noble contribooshun to the literatoor of this here great and glorious country is now a-bein' read with a-vidity an' eagerness wherever English," said Bob, who had prepared his remarks, like most "impromptu" speakers, beforehand, "is read er appreciated."

"The back counties," it is within the province of the present historian to state, "had been heard from," and William White was a famous novelist.

"I feel," continued Bob, looking with benignant approval upon De, who had colored with pleasure under the praise so worthily, as she thought, bestowed upon her old lover,—"I feel," repeated Bob impressively, "that this 'ere kump'ny 'u'd not take it kind ef we did not try to ad-e-kwately express our fittin' sense of grat-i-fi-cation in the possession of so emynent a friend and awthur; an', ef my friendly hearers 'ull purmit this here o-raytor (which meant orator) to illustrate these here ree-marks uv ple'zure an' congratulashuns, I will tell you how the man weth the load of cobs done it." Lik-kum, who could not have finished a public address, without a story to illustrate it, paused, with much dignity,

and, in the manner of a professional speaker, impressively sipped a glass of water, which had been setting before him, on a table, while all were subdued with a sense of interest becoming the pending one of Bob's famous anecdotes. "This here man," resumed Bob, after a moment of pleased silence had prepared all to hear what was coming, "w'at I speak uv weth th' load uv cobs, he wuz a gen'l'man," said Bob, with an apologetic air assumed in a manner which detracted none from the merits of his tale, "who cussed, and was a purfane man, and swore drefful. Well, this here man was noted in the nayborhood fur this pecooliarity of his'n, and all the unregen'rate kentry, roun', wuz 'customed to gather, when opportoonity offered, to list'n to this gen'l'man swear. This man, onetime, he had a load uv cobs, he did, an' he wuz a-'proaching a steep hill with his load uv cobs, and the boys, a-rememberin' th' old feller's cussin' pow'rs, they played a trick on the gen'l'man to hear him at his best. When the gen'l'man, he got to the foot of this here steep hill, he paused to rest his hosses, and the boys, they, unbeknownst to the gen'l'man, they slipped up, they did, and they drawed the eend board uv ther gen'l'man's waggin frum its fast'nin's, and w'en the gen'l'man, he driv' up ther hill, them cobs they strowed the kentryside fur miles, aroun'." Bob paused, smiled pleasantly upon his open-mouthed auditors, and went on. "The gen'l'man, he driv' on up the hill, onconshus, an' w'en he got to the top of the hill, he nach'ly stopped ter draw his breath; an' them boys had kum up through the bresh on each side uv the hill, an' onperceived, wuz arrived at the top. W'en the gen'l'man weth the cobs, he paused at the top of the hill, and removed his hat, and wiped his fur'head weth his ban'anner han'chief, fur the day wuz hot,—the gen'l'man, he chanst ter look about him, an' he ketched sight

uv one of them mischief makin' boys in ther bresh, at the top uv the hill, who wuz a squintin' thro' frum his hidin' place ter see whut 'u'd happen; and a suspicion stole thro' the mind uv the gen'l'man, an' he looked aroun' fur ter see w'at had bekum of his cobs, and he seen 'em gracefully a-ornamentin' the hillside, weth a clean, spick-span, empty waggin bed behin' him. It was mos' awful; but the gen'l'man wuz ez silent in his reception uv this 'ere cat-as-trofy as the solumn toomb, fur a min'it', an', then, he calls out to the fellers, 'at he know'd wuz k'lected ter hear him throw off prize cattle purfanity, 'No use, boys, I can't do the subjeck justice!' An'," wound up the orator, with a style of rolling if a trifle dubious ending, "my friend, Willium, we has met here, together, to-night, to celebrate the *incredible* success of a book writer, which you are; but," added Bob, in happy application of the story of the "gen'l'man" and the cobs, "no use, we 'can't do the subjeck justice," and Bob Likkum sat down amid great applause; and, "Hear, hear," from Cy, who brought a breath of the parliamentary outside world with him; and much amused laughing, and, "Good, good, Robert," from Parson Woods, capably sustained by a bland "Very well," out of the mouth of jolly Father O'Gorman, whom De had thoughtfully included in the festivities.

William White responded fittingly, in the quaint and engaging style following:

"A fairy tale," said he, and proceeded: "Once upon a time, there was a poor peasant. Where he lived, it is not needful to say, except that, as I have said, he was a peasant; and, as peasants belonged, in the olden times, to the countries across the seas, he must have lived near some enchanted forest in the old world. This peasant, you must know," and little Nanny Braddock was

paying very close attention, with the others, "was called Jabez Grosholm. Jabez had a wife; who, in her turn, being a loving and devoted helpmate, was about to present her goodman with an heir. Now, Jabez was of a wandering, adventurous disposition; and, one day, was led to leave home by a great desire to amass riches." This seemed a hit at Cy Saunders, but he didn't mind it, —no, indeed! "So, while he was gone," continued William, "a tiny son was born. Near to where lived the Goodwife Grosholm, likewise abode Garth Marktwine. The latter was a thrifty, saving soul; staid at home, and, together with his own wife, could show against his neighbor's destitute hut, a comfortable well kept place; where, as to Jabez' peasant mate, had come the stork,—though a cunning mite of a girl was left at *their* door. Now, here, happened the wonderful part,—really, almost too strange to be true, although it is sworn to by honest peasants and their neighbors throughout the country; and, to this day, they will show you many marvelous things preserved in proof, including a fairy footprint at the doorway, for, you see, the fairies, afterward, came to see them—but we are getting ahead of our story.

"As the first faint cry of the wee wayfarers was heard, there appeared suddenly at the hut of Marta Grosholm the most astonishing and wonderful bit of a creature you most ever laid your eyes on. Any of you would have given anything to see it. It was a little man, not much taller than an egg spoon, and he walked with so much dignity and even fierceness,—for he seemed indignant about something,—that, really, you felt like you had to get out of his way. He strode right into the room—there was only one, and a cuddy hole for a bed—without so much as knocking, stepping through a rent at the bottom of the door, where the cat was accustomed

to come in and go out. Notwithstanding all this lack of ceremony, he had left a coach and six outside, of such size that it would have filled all of a large gourd—one of those bigger ones, you know, that 's larger than the smaller ones. Yes. And more than that," and, here, little Nanny came in for the narrator's special attention, while the interest of the "grown-ups" was curious to see,—“and, more than that,” continued the entertainer, “it is just clear to me, that this was no ordinary personage. Who do you think it was? I'll tell you: It was King Screamtheroons, the ruler over all the Fairies, and the giver of all blessings when babies are born. Would you believe it? Fact. Well, Mrs. Grosholm was nearly mortified to death; for, you remember, she just naturally didn't have a thing in the house to eat; and the King of the Fairies just gave a bounce and was on the table and seated on the bottom of a bright brass kettle, for all the world like he had come to stay.

“He rapped the kettle smartly with something that, I guess, was a scepter; and, anyway, it tinkled on the side of the kettle like a tiny, tinkling bell.

“‘Madam,’ said his majesty, with royal condescension, while Marta Grosholm looked most scared to death, ‘do you know who I am?’

“Marta was just as ashamed as she could be because she didn't know; and she told his majesty so, and begged he wouldn't think hardly of her.

“He, thereupon, very considerably told her that he would not.

“‘But where is your husband?’ he asked, this time sharply, and rapping the kettle, once more.

“The poor woman had to confess he had gone away to hunt a fortune.

“This desertion of poor Marta must have been what

had made the King of the Fairies so fierce, when he first came into the room, for he said instantly,

“ ‘Aha! that is it,—and you are here all alone? I thought so.’ ”

“ ‘Have you anything to eat?’ questioned the royal visitor,—I think, don’t you know, more to find out whether the little baby’s mother would be able to keep the two—the little baby and herself—alive, than anything else;—but, not to hurt her feelings, you know, he went on very quickly, ‘for *we* have traveled far and fasted.’ ”

“Mrs. Grosholm was appalled at the thought; supernaturals, too,—would they not eat more than any human being could give them; and she had, as it was, only a poor handful of meal! However, she must not let the guest beneath her own humble roof go hungry, without an effort to supply his wants. The King of the Immortals watched Marta closely, while these things were going through her mind; and, believe me, having the power, of course, to read people’s thoughts, he was touched; so, you see, he had not come entirely to *touch* her. You do not believe this, but it’s all true!

“Marta rushed, they always do, you know, when they’re in a hurry, in stories and out of them,—but she did—she rushed over to her neighbor’s, the Marktwines,—for *they* had plenty, you see,—to borrow a frying pan and a piece of bacon. And what do you suppose she found there? You never would guess. She found *Queen* Seraumtheroons, sitting in with the mother and little girl-baby Marktwine. The little boy had fallen to the king’s share, and the little girl had fallen to the queen’s. Well,” went on William, having the whole night before him, “do you know what they did? I’ll tell you. They whisked everything right over to the less prosperous dwelling of Marta; for the elfin enchanters are always

kind and considerate of the poor and least favored—baby Marktwine, mother and everything, frying pan and bacon,—it all went to Marta's.

“The queen got on the table, and the king made a place for her on the bottom of the brass kettle; and then it became clear what he and the beautiful queen were there for.

“They were there, of course, to preside over the destinies of the coming generations; and after they had eaten the bacon, which they did, not forgetting some for their coachman and hosts, and relished it, they conferred together and his majesty spoke.

“‘And when,’ he said in conclusion, tinkling his scepter upon the brass kettle, ‘these, our youthful charges, are old enough as children, once a year they are to come to our domain of Fairyland, at midnight, when we hold our court, in the forest,’ and, their present mission ended, away went King and Queen Seraumthe-rooms much to the wonderment of all, and a purse of gold, of course, was found under the kettle where they had been sitting.

“So, Never-neverland became the future of these honest folk.

“And the children, by and by, went to visit the Fairies. When night would come, at the end of each year, the parents fixed them up with bows of blue ribbon, and neat white frocks, and giving them directions down by the brook and the big tree, which the little people of the wood had given to the older people, they saw, with perfect faith and confidence, the boy and girl set out alone, for the king and queen of the Fairies had said so should it be.

“And in the midnight in the wood, where the moon, as is the way with Fairies, made Fairy noon, the two children, hand in hand, emerged upon a glade, where

bluebells grew and daffodils and buttercups. And lilies of the valley hung their wee bells down, and a tiny, tiny clapper made a silvery chime, by the little hand of the sprite that rang the note; while winsome, lissom elves gaily sported on the surface of a merry, dancing cascade of gleaming, moonlit waters flashing and sparkling over lichen-covered rocks, and falling, splashing musically, upon a bed of greenest, softest mosses.

“So, hand in hand, the two children, with eyes like stars and wide and large, came, in timid, hesitating wonder, into this region of enchantment; when, from her throne of frosted calla lily cup, came the sweet and gentle queen of all these blithe and dainty little men and women. The brave king sat stately, next the dear queen’s calla lily, upon a mushroom draped to the ground, as it was, with cloth of gold sewn thick with brilliant gems. The lovely consort of the royal ruler, in this informal, loving way, brought, as a mother would, the fluttering souls before the throne of grace, and the great king said:

“‘Go with them, good my queen, that they may see.’

“And so they went and saw the glories of his kingdom. And when they had seen all the rest, they paused before a group of Fairy children, who played games; trundling hoops made of moonbeams; playing ball with buds and blossoms, and all the while filling the glade till it rang with glad and joyous frolic and sounds of laughter, song and mirth.

“‘They fight and stratch,’ lisped the little girl to the Fairy queen, ‘where we tum from, w’en they p’ay.’

“And the queen, saying this was wrong, gave them a book, and that book remains, to this day, to guide the race of man and woman and of children.

“And the Fairies gathered in a happy band and

flew away, bearing these mortal children to their earthly dwelling place; and when the peasants' offspring, in their cots, at home, wakened in the morning, they told their parents and the others all this tale of marvels.

"The book, in silver letters on leaf of gold, had become the thought of all the ages; wise men from everywhere making pilgrimage to the locality where such wisdom may be found.

"When the boy's father returned, having found riches, he was strangely perplexed as to what to do with his hoard of wealth. His son, growing taller day by day and casting longing and favored eyes upon the neighbor's beautiful daughter, showed to the sire *The Book*.

"In it the rich man read:

" 'Give unto others, that ye may, yourself, receive; the pleasures you preserve unto your kind are those of life eternal.' "

By some with silent appreciation; by others with enthusiastic applause, and by all with pleasure and interest, was William White's simple effort received, illustrating, also, as it did in its closing, the true office of his own profession—literature.

And all the while the harvest moon had not its own knowledge and the knowledge of all the other moons in the world for nothing, and could afford to wait; for it was, indeed, a wise old moon and knew its own victims. And its knowing chuckle was as slyly satisfied as ever in its long, ancient and enterprising career, when first one and then another shy, awkward and self conscious viewer of its scandalous games and snares and pitfalls came, for a spell of courting, creeping and stealing and slipping forth from smiling Mother Braddock's door, that night. It was, in truth, a shameful harvest moon, adding to its silvern complexion a dangerous golden hue as the night drew on apace; and was forcing the old, time honored

business in the most reckless manner. It nearly fell down from its saucy perch, when Esau and the fat farm-girl came forth; but soon smoothed away its merriment,—which, after all, it has always been observed, is but the healthful sauce to the meat,—and an atmosphere of concession was allowed to arms stealing about waists; and hands squeezing other hands, and—the harvest moon did very well, and placed a discreet hand before its honest, old face—lips stealing closer and closer to other lips!

O “that old sweetheart of mine!” Riley knew.

“De, hear the river!” said William White, in tones of subdued appreciation. They had walked upon the road and were returning. Nothing was in sight to break the still and perfect harmony of the hour. The splash of the river, subsiding after the recent freshet, was distinctly audible. Anon, the cry of a night bird broke, in note of deep and minor cadence, upon the air. The vague shadowy outline of distant wood accentuated landscape and moonlight. The lovers, for could ever any different state exist between them, moved slowly down the moonlit road.

“Job has come into his inheritance,” said De, with shy self consciousness.

William laughed softly.

“And Esau, poor Esau!” ejaculated the girl gently, moved to sensations of mirth, but too tender hearted to let her sense of humor, stirred by a recollection of the fat boy’s recent sentimental and romantic courtship, have vent.

“The discovery,” said White, a little less considerate than his sweetheart, “of the nineteenth century.”

Silence—the night bird’s call—a song, by Cy, of the wild-west border, floating out in the night!

“And, De, I—have I—have I come into mine?”

"Your—your what, William?" replied the other in a low voice.

"My 'inheritance.' "

"Your inheritance, William?" murmured the girl under the spell now surely beginning to creep over two souls,—“your inheritance was your genius and its achievements—you have come into that.”

"But the rest of it, De,—oh, all the rest?"

The harvest moon—golden, now, full golden, oh! miracle—hung in generous and tender sympathy still and grave above, shedding its flood of lovely, translucent light over the fluttering spirits below; which even now instinctively rose to those divine rays of solemn glory, clinging hopefully, trustfully to their strong and enduring support.

"The rest, William?"

"Yes—the rest—you," said the man.

"I was always yours."

That harvest moon could not cease without one more piece of scandalous behavior; and so Esau and the fat girl were distinctly laughed at, by the outrageous old rogue, when the fat farmboy, after much exertion, triumphantly planted a kiss upon the lips of the fat maiden, and ran, in lubberly haste, from the side of his victim to escape the infliction of instant and condign punishment at her hands.

Bob has closed the game, after many years, with Ann Mariah, and is coming in from the wood afar with his prize; and Job has secured the widow.

And now, before the night is over, all are once more gathered within dear old Uncle Peter's cheery parlor, with Mother Braddock beaming at the old gentleman's side; and we look in at the open door and take one last fond farewell, ere, forever, the scene shall fade and vanish in the loving haze and maze of years.

CHAPTER XLIX.

GOODBY.

The native force of William White's thought, in a district of undeveloped ideas; the prestige of honorable character,—war service and success; the unexpected popularity resulting from the restoration of its stolen wealth to the community, and, on White's part, a desire to test some of his views in an effort to improve the condition of the people, obtained for the celebrated writer political favor. The opposition now wanted Jason Jump's acute cunning; and Brad Simons was rapidly losing caste. The election came off; and Benjamin Grigscomb was among the first to gracefully congratulate William White upon a triumphant victory.

To Washington, therefore, were De and William, now married, come; the beautiful woman inspiring and aiding every elevated and generous thought which her husband might entertain for the advancement and development of humanity.

And to the side of the ideal couple come the humble friends of home.

First, Bob Likkum stands forth, and the blushing—blushing! of course, she's blushing—why not?—she's a bride—oh, the blushing Ann Mariah. Bob and Ann are on their "weddin' tower," for Bob says so, and Bob knows.

And the Honorable William White recognizes the true state of the case.

"Bob,— why, Bob,— and Ann — Ann Mariah! oh,

Ann, it's happy ye air," exclaims William laughingly and justified, on his own part, by a specimen of dazzling and wondrous womanhood presiding over his perfect Washington establishment, where the happy couple from home is being heartily welcomed,—“so you and Bob finally did it! Well, well, Bob, you see it's everywhere,” and William, continuing to smile happily, waves his one strongly knit hand in the direction of De, who stands softly glowing at her husband's side, her eyes shining, her chestnut hair drawn, in wondrous waves over her ears, and a bunch of marvelous red roses in the bosom of her orange-colored silk.

Ann feels it incumbent to blush, again, and looks so demure and sweet, in her own turn, in her old fashioned, corn-colored, straw poke bonnet and white ribbons and pearl gray dress, that Bob needs no approval of any other than his own feelings to justify the act which has brought him and Ann Mariah to Washington.

“Yes, Bob,” says William, as Robert and Ann Mariah take their leave, “it shall be done—Job Saunders shall be postmaster,” and Ann Mariah is happier, if possible, than ever.

Uncle Peter and Martha both lived until they saw White and De in the fullness of time in Washington, “managin’,” as Uncle Peter put it, “the affairs of con-gurss.” Mother Braddock and Peter passed a happy and peaceful time together, after that. In fact, Peter did not leave Martha, for many comfortable years; but, a decade after the old stock had reached the three-score-years-and-ten of earthly mortal limit, it happened to present itself naturally to the old man at this advanced and good old age, that he had “a call to die,” as he said, and, obeying the “Lord's will,” he died. Mother Braddock followed, shortly after.

Parson Woods visited Washington in company with

a lady, as his wife, who has figured effectively in this story. Mona Walker, the former housekeeper of Brad Simons, and who had preserved, in all and perfect truth, a stainless character in the cattleman's service, discovering the intolerable and innate villainy of Simons' nature, yielded to the suit of Parson Woods and became the wife of the worthy pastor. The parson and the attractive lady whose affections he had won were cordially entertained by William and De; and Mr. and Mrs. Woods returned to Indiana with a lively sense of the greatness and importance of their national representatives. The parson and his true and loving helpmate continued long to confer blessings upon their community; and have left a memory for unselfish service among the people of their flock, that fills, with the odor of true sanctity, the region of their former lives.

The earnest and worthy Father Patrick O'Gorman, at the little rectory, went on with the work of saving souls according to his light; and passed away in an atmosphere of pious and happy remembrance.

Job, in recognition of old Cy, his father, and his own reformed merit, was eventually made postmaster at T——, through William White; and Job's wife, once the Widow Walmsey, continued to be the harmless envy and the pattern of the social circles of the rural neighborhood. Job made a good public officer; and his father, old Cy Saunders, was heard to say, "That Job Sa'nders should have a good slice of his (Cy's) money." The returned western miner did not forget gentle, faithful little Ann Mariah; but, like a practical, shrewd old fellow that he was, drew his own conclusions touching the fidelity and worth of patient Ann's devotion to the old home, during Cy's absence fortune hunting; and, on hearing the neighbors discourse eloquently upon the theme of Ann Mariah's desert, made an allowance for

Ann in his will, which would leave her comfortable for all time; and Ann, being so informed by her thoughtful parent, must, of course, think only of the good fortune this would, some day, through her, bring to Bob, and flew to tell that humorist of the latest circumstance. And Bob Likkum, may his memory ever grow greener! and sweet Ann Mariah long flourished; and old Cy had chubby grandchildren until his days were full of them and contented blessedness; when he, too, was gathered to the joys and the delights of his own fathers.

Well, well, now, how about Esau and the fat girl? Ah, there is a subject of delight, as we regretfully near the end! White and De were enabled, before William's retirement from public life, to contemplate the budding bliss in matrimonial days of the fat farmboy and his plump consort; and were among the very first to present marriage gifts to the blooming young couple. The appearance of a fat and rosy infant, the result of this last named union, was hailed with great gladness and much feasting and joy by all friends, neighbors and well wishers of the hearty parents.

John and Nance Braddock, with little Nanny, thrrove; and John, at last, grew to be one of the most prosperous and successful business men of his community, and paid old Cy to the last dollar.

Rachel Bolers never wanted; and William and De were forever and always her friends.

But who electioneered so effectively for William White, when in the heat of his political canvass; who was it kept the ball rolling, on the score of a man who had a wife like De; who was it roused the neighborhood and neighborhoods in such a way that it is recalled to this day in all that district,—and did it with such tireless and untold enthusiasm,—to love and respect for a woman with courage that would stand for justice with

life—for a woman whose influence could be counted upon with a husband representing the deep and sacred principles of fireside and family, in the national halls of congress—a woman whose life was the life of White's every act, and who made it, finally, so patent that William White wasn't to be the representative, at all, but De was to be, that they really had to elect William White in order to send De to congress? Who was it? Why, Smoky Billings.

White purchased a good farm in Indiana; and Smoky took charge of it, and lived always in comfort. He never entertained other opinion of great men, than that drawn from his own ideal, William White; and continued to idolize De and a little boy that came to her and William.

The nest of outlaws was broken up; and Brad Simons' dealings with them being finally discovered he was forced to flee the country, and all trace of him became lost; until the news came, one spring, that he had been killed, somewhere in the west, while cheating at cards.

But the phantoms and the shadows were not yet laid.

One day, William White, upon a visit home from Washington, had taken De and, lovers ever, had driven out to the old mill, where the congressman and Smoky Billings had once passed through a season of dangerous and apparently unproductive observation of the now disbanded and scattered criminals. De and William had been blessed with a child, a son, a bright and handsome lad now seven years of age—their one imperishable star of hope and love, and who, on this occasion, made their cherished and precious companion. It was a beautiful evening in the early fall. The leaves were changing their hues, and the mild and gentle air blew softly upon

the cheek, still damasked as of old, which, with its happy owner, nestled closely to her husband's side. A strange and unaccountable impulse had prompted the famous man, author and publicist, to revisit this scene of former days. The thin, silver crescent of a young new moon hung in the quiet evening sky, as they neared the wild, picturesque spot where stood the dismantled, tumble-down ruins—reminder of his old adventure. The dark outlines of the ruined and deserted mill, amongst the rocks and crags and trees of former days, blent in soft, dusky picturings against the silent heavens. The dry ledge of rock over which the miniature falls made its laughing, sparkling way, when the neighboring stream was full, and recalled by William White in its situation near the mill, was now covered with a dancing, rolling, glancing sheet of water from a plentifully supplied channel above. De,—who was as ardent in her love of the poetic and the beautiful as was her lover-husband himself,—and the boy were in raptures at the singular wild and desolate beauty of the scene.

Something told White that a discovery was at hand; but restrained him from speaking of what underlay the real object of their trip. He had deemed it useless before, at any period of mutual trials in the past, to enter, with his wife, upon those speculations which had possessed his own mind in this one of his and Smoky's affairs, and which had, likewise, absorbed his thought in connection, as well, with things he had learned since his own service had begun at the nation's capital.

They entered the interesting ruins. The walls of the building, now in many places fallen away, gave entrance to the fading evening light. William White had provided a lantern which, lighted, enabled them to make their way over the rough, uneven flooring—here and there lacking boarding. White had told De of the robbers' haunt; of

his own witness of their meeting, that night, in the mill, when he and Billings were bent on probing the lives of the outlaws, but had, as perceived, been silent upon certain surmises which had succeeded in gradually creeping into his own understanding. Rats scurried before them, as they proceeded over the uncertain floor of the deserted and abandoned building; and a forlornness impossible to describe possessed and haunted the place.

A theory of search and investigation led White to where the rotting and disused old millwheel still clung, in fragmentary reminder of its days of long past usefulness, and visible from within through the crumbling wall. As he and the companions of his strange visit neared the rear of the disordered premises a broken lantern—readily recognized by the curious visitor as, in all probability, the one kicked over and shattered by the endangered offender before the outlaw court—was seen lying near, the glass crushed and scattered about and the wires, enclosing the lamp, bent and twisted; a condition of things testifying graphically to the deadly and determined energy with which the menaced victim had asserted his efforts for freedom and escape from the ruthless judgment of his former direful and threatening custodians.

William White turned to the mother and the child.

“See!” said he swinging his own lantern at the spot; “here is where the man stood under sentence of death; hereabouts, where those passing judgment upon him were,” and he examined the rough boards constituting the rude flooring of the place to discover, if possible, the footprints, which the thick layer of dust might render natural of presence, of the vanished outlaws. “Look,” exclaimed the intent novelist, “there are their footprints,” and there they were,—undisturbed; the

place unvisited, in all this time,—sheltered by the huge millstone.

De and the boy Edward—the latter naturally filled with the wild spirit of youthful adventure—surveyed these evidences of the past, with thrilling and absorbed interest.

“And thus do things pass away like a tale that is told.”

Time, the great effacer of all things material and immaterial, was bedimming this page of the great writer's earlier experiences. Four successive terms, served in congress by White, had intervened between the present and the outlawry and the criminal reprisal of the time of Jason Jump. They had been hardworking terms. The representative of the people had seen some of the seeds of good faith, which he had patiently and loyally sown, blossom and bear fruit. And, from his investigations and research at the seat of national affairs, it had formed, in the gradual process of his trained literary mind, as a sure and logical intuition, that the paper he had seen the robber perusing, on that memorable night eight years before, must surely have had some value as a record not only of the life of him who read it, but of a phase of unfair human society. The criminal and outlawed reader he had now finally judged to be one whose career, at Washington, had been singularly blameless, until, driven by the abuse of representative government, he had followed in the wake of the long and melancholy procession of rebels against temporal injustice and betrayal which, victorious or otherwise, stretches back across the dim, endless and forgotten pathway of the history and of the ages of the human race.

If White and Billings had judged the mysterious document from which, on the night in the mill, they had caught apparent expressions delivered by the outlawed

leader, connecting suspicion with the possible murderer of Ezekiel Smithin,—if they had, then, supposed the paper, in this way, to have been capable of supplying evidence important to John Braddock's acquittal, White himself had now been long since convinced of the correctness of the jury's real finding — which, it should be remembered, had, in no sense, implicated the outlaws. Therefore, Jason Jump—whom he, at last, felt assured was one and the same with Black Hank, could, in the present investigator's conclusions, have had no complicity in Smithin's death. But what, in that case was the further meaning of this unexplained paper? And in the additional endeavor to satisfy this query he had come out to the old mill, hoping to find the robber's record.

He found it—found it carefully secreted beneath the enduring rock of the place,—hidden away in a crevice under the old millstone. It was the diary of Jason Jump. It was the requiem sung over a broken heart and a shattered life. No memory of the past breathed pleasant hope for the future. It was the tragedy of human things. It wailed aloud in universal and empty space.

"You framers of codes," it read; "you makers of laws; but, beyond all, you judges and dissemblers in the pretended dispensation of justice, from bench, from legislative hall, and from the critical housetop of public and false profession, look you out! for the hour cometh and this handwriting is on the wall: 'The people cry in the wilderness, and their lamentation is bitter, and their lamentation is death!'"

In another place, there was an impassioned reference to "the rebellion of George Washington against his English home-rule government."

"George Washington," it said, "was a rebel against the insufferable and insupportable injustice under which, at the hands of his country, he groaned. Had he failed,

he would have been gibbeted and his memory been made odious for all time. He succeeded against the law. He goes into the march of the ages, leading as a god and embalmed, in the reverend and sacred purity of the history of a country he had so heroically and materially assisted in making, as a representative, in the imperfection of the earth, of the ideal of perfection and perfection's honor."

Over one portion White lingered.

"The Smithin case!" it said; "what can I be charged with in that? I did not kill Zeke Smithin. Conscience? stuff!"

But, still, in this strange, mysterious character, conscience had never wholly died. There were blind, almost incoherent appeals to standards and authorities of human conduct, in an apparent and hopeless attempt to ease the saddened casuist's bruised and bleeding soul. After seemingly fruitless efforts to satisfy the course of action into which the injustice of events had driven him, —Jason Jump, outlawed victim of his times and the unworthy rule of his land, began his conclusion in the words remembered by the peruser of this unsparing posthumous national and universal arraignment:

"And shall I add the Smithin case? Why not? His murder is as much upon my soul as if I, indeed, had committed it. I missed the time and place of his expected passing or his blood, too, would have been upon my hands and upon the hands of those who drove me to it!"

They read the story of the life of the outlaw chieftain; and the child was told never to leave the path of honor, love, duty and unselfishness.

Sobered and saddened, De and William and Edward left the old mill, with its mournful history, and saw the crescent of silver, in the silent heavens, symbolizing their own peaceful loves and eternal, enduring faith.

"Our honeymoon—still our honeymoon, sweetheart," said the young wife, shyly.

White, as he drove back, reverted to the night in the flooded cave, when they had watched the dead outlaw; who, in his lifetime, had written the sheets that they had just read. As, in the time of that stress of danger and threatened destruction, De had whispered to her lover, so she now whispered:

" 'William?' "

And so did William answer,

" 'Best beloved?' "

" 'Did the man do his duty?' "

" 'The dead man?' "

" 'The dead man.' "

" 'God help him!' "

And so they laid away, forever, Jason Jump; and the shadows ceased from troubling, and the weary was at rest.

"The magic reel has run its length."

"While out of this that death shall ever leave behind, spring flowers of immortality and promise;" and, in the vision of the future, William White could see all changed; and the defeated outlaw rebel's victory was in a recreated land and laws and justice; when, from out the darkened caverns of the brooding night's long, toiling past had come the glorious dawn of love, duty and unselfishness.

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